

# For Reference

---

**NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM**

# For Reference

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

Ex libris  
UNIVERSITATIS  
ALBERTAENSIS







THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IMAGERY AND ARCHETYPE  
IN THE  
POETRY OF TENNYSON

by



GORDON ROSS CARNEGIE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Imagery and Archetype in the Poetry of Tennyson, submitted by Gordon Ross Carnegie in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.





## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the significance of the imagery and archetype in Tennyson's poetry by using the suggestive investigations of Freud and Jung into the nature and representations of the basic tensions in the mind. These investigations seem to me to point to some of the fundamental aspects of Tennyson's imagination. His poetry is animated by a dialectic of sense and conscience which is incarnate in recurrent archetypes and patterns of imagery whose full significance is realized in the two long narrative poems of Tennyson's maturity, Maud and the Idylls of the King. My approach is essentially to read Tennyson's later poems in terms of patterns which are investigated in his earlier work, and, in doing so, to show the nature and development of Tennyson's imagination. I believe that the psychological values which underlie the dialectic of sense and conscience are of such a nature that this central tension in Tennyson's imaginative universe is never completely resolved.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I Introduction.....	1
II The Early Forms of Tennyson's Archetype.....	13
III 1832 and 1842: The Poems on Art.....	30
IV <u>The Princess</u> : Tennyson's Attempted Synthesis.....	51
V <u>Maud</u> : Tennyson's Synthesis.....	64
VI Archetype and Imagery in the <u>Idylls of the King</u> .....	81
VII Tennyson's Final Vision.....	118
Footnotes.....	131
Bibliography.....	134



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Of Tennyson's critics T. S. Eliot and A. J. Carr are among the few who have sensed the nature, depth, and complexity of Tennyson's imagination. In his essay In Memoriam Eliot calls Tennyson the "great master. . . of melancholia."<sup>1</sup> Extending Eliot's observations, Carr calls the "theme of loss" the "talisman of [Tennyson's] imaginative energy," and suggests, much as Eliot does, that Tennyson's "ideas flow in the current of his melancholic sensibility."<sup>2</sup>

My own understanding of Tennyson's poetic personality agrees with the portrait which Eliot adumbrates and Carr develops:

I do not believe for a moment that Tennyson was a man of mild feelings or weak passions. There is no evidence in his poetry that he knew the experience of violent passion for a woman; but there is plenty of evidence of emotional intensity and violence--but of emotion so deeply suppressed, even from himself, as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action. And it is emotion which, so far as my reading of the poems can discover, attained no ultimate clear purgation. I should reproach Tennyson not for mildness, or tepidity, but rather for lack of serenity.

Of love that never found his earthly close,  
What sequel?<sup>3</sup>

Rather than choosing to extend these remarks to the full exegesis of Maud and the Idylls of the King which, to me at least, they seem





to suggest, Eliot censures Maud as being "shrill rather than deep"<sup>4</sup> and the Idylls for an alleged failure in the narrative; Carr, following Eliot, finds Tennyson's career after 1850 a "recapitulation of his earlier developments," and as such ignores Maud altogether and dismisses the Idylls as "defaced in parts by [Tennyson's] delusions of certainty."<sup>5</sup> Ignoring these value judgments, the suggestions of both Eliot and Carr provide a context in which the nature of Tennyson's entire development can be seen.

The purpose of this thesis is, so far as my approach allows, to explicate Tennyson's poetry. I believe that the tensions in Tennyson's poetic universe are defined by imagery and archetype, and that an analysis of imagery and archetype in Tennyson's major poems should illustrate something of the organic character of Tennyson's poetic vision. In pursuit of this objective I shall employ wherever appropriate the suggestive investigations of Freud and Jung into the larger meanings of various archetypes and constellations of imagery, for these investigations seem to me to point to relationships which will perhaps clarify some of the fundamental aspects of Tennyson's imagination. As Northrop Frye reminds the critic, in the construction of an interpretative commentary on a work of art the critic is engaging in allegoresis, a process which implies that the structure of meaning in a work of art exists within





or beneath the fiction he is commenting on, and that the function of the commentary is to lay it bare.<sup>6</sup> Using the suggestions of modern depth psychology, my method is essentially that which Frye points out.

Tennyson himself understood the tensions which motivate his melancholy poetic vision in the terms implied in the title of his early uncollected allegory, "Sense and Conscience," where the giant Conscience awakens in and destroys the garden of Sense, only to discover himself torn by guilt and a sense of alienation manifesting itself in an agony of remorse. The poem suggests the necessity and the penalties of repression, for Conscience can accept neither the stultifying immersion in the sensual garden of memory, nor the pain of a consciousness alienated from the present. That this problem dominates Tennyson's poetic vision is suggested again in the epilogue to the Idylls of the King where Tennyson asks the Queen to accept his poem "shadowing Sense at war with Soul." I believe that the insights of modern depth psychology, upon which my allegorization of Tennyson is based, are such as may disperse some of the shadows both in the Idylls and in Tennyson's earlier work.

The sense of frustration in "Sense and Conscience" appears to be the result of the paradoxical significance of what Tennyson



calls "The Passion of the Poet," that sense that it is the dead poet which lives and the living present which is dead:

Today? but what of yesterday? for oft  
 On me, when boy, there came what then I call'd,  
 Who knew no books and no philosophies,  
 In my boy-phrase, 'The Passion of the Past.'  
 The first gray streak of earliest summer-dawn,  
 The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,  
 As if the late and early were but one --  
 A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower  
 Had murmurs, 'Lost and gone, and lost and gone!'  
 A breath, a whisper -- some divine farewell --  
 Desolate sweetness -- far and far away --  
 What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?  
 I know not, and I speak of what has been.  
 ("The Ancient Sage," 216-227)

The full dimensions of the oxymoronic "desolate sweetness" in the contemplation of the past is perhaps most effectively dramatized in the lyric "Tears, Idle Tears," where the speaker turns to paradox in his attempt to explain the significance of the tears which well up from the heart of his being. The speaker's oxymoronic "divine despair" for the past, which is forever gone and yet is eternally present in the unconscious ocean of memory, is suggested by the scene of full autumnal ripeness which calmly approaches death. Such a "divine despair" is a union of contrasting qualities: the days are fresh as the dawning light on a sail which heralds the joyous reunion with friends returning from the underworld, from the darkness beyond the horizon as well as the classical abode of the dead; the day is also sad as the last beam which reddens over the ship "which





sinks with all we love below the verge." The past, then, is a paradoxical fusion of reunion and separation, of the dawn and the dusk, of the emergence from and disappearance of loved ones into the dark ocean of the unconscious. In Tennyson's earlier poetry the voyage into the dark world of unconscious wholeness, where the opposites are mystically united, is accomplished without remorse, for in the dream world of the watery womb the being is overwhelmed by the song of

something which possess'd  
The darkness of the world, delight,  
Life, anguish, death, immortal love,  
Ceasing not, mingled, unrepress'd,  
Apart from place, withholding time.  
("Recollections of the Arabian Nights," 71-75)

Such recollections can occur without pain because the dreamer has not been awakened as he has in "Tears, Idle Tears." In stanza three Tennyson develops the paradoxical significance of memory by fusing its contrasting qualities into a single image, that of a dying man's perception of the waking world beyond. Cleanth Brooks crystallizes Tennyson's ironic reversal of the living present and the dead past in an admirably concise form: "the dead past seems to the living man as unfamiliar and fresh in its sadness as the living present seems to the dying man."<sup>7</sup> Just as the dead past which returns engages the whole mind of the thinker of stanza one, so the dying man becomes sensitive to the half-awakened dawning world only when he



must depart. Because memory has a reality for the thinker which actuality does not possess, he must experience a life which is death and a death which is life. In the final stanza of "Tears, Idle Tears," the images suggest that "The Passion of the Past" (italics mine) is much more than a pallid metaphor: the speaker's attachment to the past is suffused with an eroticism which appears to be hardly under control, for in every image is a sense of the frustration which the speaker experiences in the contemplation of the past which attracts and must forever elude him.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,  
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd  
On lips that are for others; deep as love,  
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;  
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

The complex nature of the conflicts which result in the speaker's frustration is central to an account of the nature and development of Tennyson's imagination. As the totality of memories which are always present in the unconscious but which elude the conscious mind, the speaker appears to be living the death-wish, to desire the dissolution into unconscious life, for the womb from which the fountain of life arises is also the drowning tomb into which the speaker is tempted to return. His longing for days which are "deep as love, / Deep as first love, and wild with all regret" suggests his attachment to the first object of love, the mother, in whom the child (and all men as





unconscious children) finds his whole being. But the facile return to the watery paradise of the womb-tomb is hardly a serious possibility, for such self-indulgence inexorably raises the spectre of guilt, here called despair. Despair, in its medieval and renaissance personifications, is the most dangerous of all psychological states since it feeds off that conscience which is so scrupulous in its sense of its utter worthlessness that it believes itself incapable of forgiveness. Since such despair is a longing not for salvation but for annihilation, it is a perversion of true remorse as it is understood in Christian terms. Remorse for what is gone is a means of expressing forbidden desires while at the same time punishing them for existing: in this respect, memory acts like the dream where conscience distorts the true nature of deeper unconscious wishes in order to make them acceptable to the conscious. Like the speaker of "Tears, Idle Tears," Tithonus finds himself in a state of living death, alienated on the one hand from the fresh and living dawn of memory as well as from the present:

Ay me! ay me! with what another heart  
 In days far-off, and with what other eyes  
 I used to watch -- if I be he that watch'd --  
 The lucid outline forming round thee; saw  
 The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;  
 Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood  
 Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all  
 Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,  
 Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm  
 With kisses balmier than half-opening buds



Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd  
 Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet.

. . . . .

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East;  
 How can my nature longer mix with thine?  
 Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold  
 Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet  
 Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam  
 Floats up from those dim fields about the homes  
 Of happy men that have the power to die,  
 And grassy barrows of the happier dead.  
 Release me, and restore me to the ground.  
 Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave;  
 Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn,  
 I earth in earth forget these empty courts,  
 And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

(50-76)

Tithonus's longing for unconsciousness and death, like that expressed in many of Tennyson's later poems, appears to be a punishment for his desire for the beautiful Eos, Goddess of the Dawn, who is apparently his own mother. The contrast of the dream of the paradise of desire existing in memory, and the waking wasteland of the present haunted by the deadening sense of guilt is poignantly dramatized in the germinal lyric of Maud, "O that 't were possible."

Half the night I waste in sighs,  
 Half in dreams I sorrow after  
 The delight of early skies;  
 In a wakeful doze I sorrow  
 For the hand, the lips, the eyes,  
 For the meeting of the morrow,  
 The delight of happy laughter,  
 The delight of low replies.





Do I hear her sing as of old,  
 My bird with the shining head,  
 My own dove with the tender eye?  
 But there rings on a sudden a passionate cry,  
 There is some one dying or dead,  
 And a sullen thunder is roll'd;  
 For a tumult shakes the city,  
 And I wake, my dream is fled.  
 In the shuddering dawn, behold,  
 Without knowledge, without pity,  
 By the curtains of my bed  
 That abiding phantom cold!

(Part II, IV, v and vii)

The dreamer's conscience must interrupt the dream of incestuous union, and punish him for his desires:

Always I long to creep  
 Into some still cavern deep,  
 There to weep, and weep, and weep  
 My whole soul out to thee.

(Part II, IV, xiii)

As I shall later show, the highly charged emotional conflicts associated with regression, what Tennyson apparently means by Sense, virtually necessitate an identification with the centre of authority in the personality, Tennyson's Conscience, or in my own terms, the Freudian Super-ego. If one fully credits the complexity of the conflicts surrounding "The Passion of the Past," one can perhaps understand something of the "emotional intensity and violence--but of emotion so deeply suppressed. . . as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action." Among other reasons adumbrated in the foregoing analysis of Tennyson's melan-



cholia, the situation of the Tennysonian hero suggests that of Hamlet, whose situation Eliot finds strikingly like that of Tennyson's hero: "The artistic 'inevitability' [of Macbeth] lies in [the] complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in Hamlet. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear."<sup>8</sup> As I shall later show in detail, Tennyson deliberately invokes Shakespeare's Hamlet as a touchstone to the larger significance of Maud and the Idylls of the King, where Tennyson dramatizes in its most comprehensive form the melancholia resulting from the interaction of sense and conscience.

Arthur Hallam's review, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," might be said to stand as Tennyson's own early artistic manifesto. Hallam is concerned to disprove the assertion that the highest species of modern poetry is reflective, and is concerned to prove that poetry should be measured by the "contiguity of the sentiments" rather than by the logical relations of the ideas. Clearly, Hallam is right when he asserts that the early Tennyson is a poet of sensation rather than reflection.<sup>9</sup> It would, however, be unjust to ignore the moral aspect of Tennyson's aesthetic, for the problem of incest





which seems to dominate Tennyson's poetry is essentially a moral question. Hallam's criticism of the poetry of the Lakers anticipates in a most remarkable way the problems which Tennyson himself confronts in his later poetry. In Hallam's opinion, a modern aesthetic combining sensation and reflection is an improbability:

Now there is undoubtedly no reason why the poet may not find beauty in those moods of emotion, which arise from the combinations of reflective thought; and it is possible that he may delineate these with fidelity, and not be led astray by an suggestions of an unpoetical mood. But though possible, it is hardly probable.<sup>10</sup>

Hallam suggests the temptations implicit in sense, those which eventually motivate the full development of Tennyson's moral aesthetic:

We do not deny that it is, on other accounts, dangerous for frail humanity to linger with fond attachment in the vicinity of sense. Minds of this description are especially liable to moral temptations; and upon them, more than any, it is incumbent to remember, that their mission as men, which they share with their fellow-beings, is of infinitely higher interest than their mission as artists, which they possess by rare and exclusive privilege. But it is obvious that, critically speaking, such temptations are of slight moment. Not the gross and evident passions of our nature, but the elevated and less separable desires, are the dangerous enemies which misguide the poetic spirit in its attempts at self-cultivation. That delicate sense of fitness which grows with the growth of artist feelings, and strengthens with their strength, until it acquires a celerity and weight of decision hardly inferior to the correspondent judgments of conscience, is weakened by every indulgence of heterogeneous aspirations, however pure they may be, however lofty, however suitable to human nature.<sup>11</sup>



Given my preliminary analysis of the psychological aspects of Tennyson's melancholy, it seems inevitable to conclude that imaginative indulgence in aesthetic self-cultivation is more an enemy of Tennyson's imagination than the "elevated and less separable desires" which Hallam thought vitiated the poetic spirit.

Without the suggestive investigations of modern depth psychology, the larger dimensions of Tennyson's development from an aesthetic to a moral poet prove largely impervious to accurate critical elucidation, for these investigations provide a scheme by which central patterns in Tennyson's work become evident. It is my conviction that the tension between sense and conscience is never resolved, and that the myriad of short and long poems are protean forms of a single archetype which lies at the basis of the conflict.



## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY FORMS OF TENNYSON'S ARCHETYPE

The psychological dimensions of the problem of sense and conscience are apparent in an analysis of several very early poems. In the lengthiest of these, "The Lover's Tale," the hero's repeatedly frustrated desire to return to the garden world of the past prevents him from adjusting to the present. Atonement with the father and recognition of authority within the personality, as well as subscription to the reality principle, are essential to the hero, but appear only as negative forces preventing the passionate wish-fulfillment of the hero's dreams. "The Lover's Tale" is concerned with the hero's retarded transition from childhood to adulthood, and with the difficulty of coming to terms with the tyrannical father-figure. A comparison of "The Lover's Tale" with its late sequel "The Golden Supper," in which the hero recognizes the authority of the father-figure, points the direction of Tennyson's later development which culminates in the Idylls of the King.

In "The Lover's Tale" regret and loss are products of a guilty desire to return to the peaceful unconsciousness of childhood, and to escape the pain of adjustment to the present. Julian lives





entirely in the past:

Yet is my life nor in the present time,  
 Nor in the present place.  
 . . . . .  
 The Present is the vassal of the Past:  
 So that, in that I have lived, do I live,  
 And cannot die, and am, in having been --  
 A portion of a pleasant yesterday.  
 (I, 112-118)

The retreat over the "deep and stormy strait" of time which separates the hero from his "native land of love" is a regression into the paradisaal world of childhood before time and consciousness have interrupted its wholeness and security. Fantasies of old age and exile mask the guilt caused by the hero's regressive desires: Julian introduces himself as a Tithonus living in a hell of eternal time,

A body journeying onward, sick with toil,  
 The weight as if of age upon my limbs,  
 The grasp of hopeless grief about my heart,  
 And all the senses weaken'd, save in that,  
 Which long ago they had glean'd and garner'd up  
 Into the granaries of memory --  
 . . . . .  
 and all the while  
 The light soul twines and mingles with the growths  
 Of vigorous early days, attracted, won,  
 Married, made one with, molten into all  
 The beautiful in Past of act or place.  
 (I, 120-131)

The Lover's Bay, the "pleasant breast of waters," the "mountain nest" and "pleasure boat that rock'd" suggest the simplicity and





aloofness of the infantile world dominated by the beneficent mother, with whose image the whole world is fused.

The paradise of innocence is associated with both east and west, birth and death, and contains the opposites before they are separated by the coming of experience. The maternal nature of the paradise, and of Camilla herself, suggests that Camilla is the carrier of the anima, man's experience of the contrasexual, his own inner self, and is evidently an image of Julian's own mother.<sup>1</sup> His eyes dwell on her with a thought

that will not pass, till earth  
And heaven pass too, dwelt on my heaven, a face  
Most starry-fair, but kindled from within  
As 't were with dawn. She was dark-hair'd, dark-eyed --  
O, such dark eyes! a single glance of them  
Will govern a whole life from birth to death,  
Careless of all things else, led on with light  
In trances and in visions. Look at them,  
You lose yourself in utter ignorance;  
You cannot find their depth; for they go back,  
And farther back, and still withdraw themselves  
Quite into the deep soul.

(I, 68-79)

Julian's description of Camilla is virtually identical to the description of the "witching fantasies" of Sense in "Sense and Conscience":

Lovely with bright black eyes and long black hair  
And lips which moved in silence, shaping words  
With meaning all too sweet for sound.

(67-69)

A similar description of blissful dependence occurs in the "Supposed Confessions":



Thrice happy state again to be  
 The trustful infant on the knee,  
 Who lets his rosy fingers play  
 About his mother's neck, and knows  
 Nothing beyond his mother's eyes!  
 They comfort him by night and day;  
 They light his little life alway;  
 He hath no thought of coming woes;  
 He hath no care of life or death;  
 Scarce outward signs of joy arise,  
 Because the Spirit of happiness  
 And perfect peace so inward is;  
 And loveth so his innocent heart,  
 Her temple and her place of birth,  
 Where she would ever wish to dwell,  
 Life of the fountain there, beneath  
 Its salient springs, and far apart,  
 Hating to wander out on earth,  
 Or breathing into the hollow air.

(40-58)

The imagery which the youthful Tennyson employs to describe one hero's relationship with his beloved is the same as that which he uses to describe another's relation to his mother. This identification explains why none of the love relationships in Tennyson's poetry are successful, for love masks the adolescent hero's incestuous desires.

The rather unusual archetypal configuration of characters in "The Lover's Tale" suggest that the love situation is Oedipal. Julian and Camilla are cousins, born on the same day, each immediately losing a parent of the same sex as himself. Of his father Julian says,





Before he saw my day my father died,  
 And he was happy that he saw me not;  
 But I and the first daisy on his grave  
 From the same clay came into light at once.  
 (I, 185-188)

It is curious that Julian is so certain that his father would not have wished to see him, a wish that seems to be more his own than his father's. The second and beneficent father-figure dies when the hero reaches eighteen, implying that the difficulty in coming to terms with the father blocks any development beyond puberty. Removing the father-figure, as Julian does, apparently symbolizes a son's desire to replace his father in his mother's affections. The transition from childhood to at least physical adulthood is symbolized by the ascent of the Hill of Woe, a hill which Camilla, as beneficent mother, would rather call the Hill of Hope. The full ambiguity of the ascent is suggested in the sexual imagery. The blood-red poppy, symbol of sexuality and death, is woven into Camilla's garland, despite her warning not to include it because it symbolizes the evil in the world. She qualifies this caution, however, by adding an equivocal "nothing in nature is unbeautiful." Julian quotes Camilla's reflection on the poppy:

I wove  
 Even the dull-blooded poppy-stem, 'whose flower  
 Hued with the scarlet of a fierce sunrise,  
 Like to the wild youth of an evil prince,  
 Is without sweetness, but who crowns himself  
 Above the naked poisons of his heart  
 In his old age.' (I, 343-349)





Tennyson transposed this passage from the earlier "Sense and Conscience," where it suggests the same ambiguous value of repression manifested in the personality of Julian.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously the father cannot be simply wished out of existence, for the third father-figure, Lionel, stands as a necessary figure of authority preventing the fulfillment of Julian's infantile desires. The hero makes plain the two alternatives with which he is left: the doubtful solace of exile and the "reflex of action" or wish-fulfillment through waking visions. It is these alternatives which Tennyson juxtaposes in the companion poems "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," and in the first two parts of Maud. The bridge between the worlds of adolescence and maturity is blocked by the father:

A woful man -- for so the story went --  
Had thrust his wife and child and dash'd himself  
Into the dizzy depths below.  
(I, 370-372)

Julian is unwilling to confront the father-figure and instead longs for the ease of infantile security. After his separation from Camilla, Julian, like the speaker of Maud, is obsessed by the cavern-garden where they parted:

If you go far in --  
The country people rumor -- you may hear  
The moaning of the woman and the child,  
Shut in the secret chambers of the rock.



I too have heard a sound -- perchance of streams  
 Running far on within its inmost halls,  
 The home of darkness; but the cavern-mouth,  
 Half overtrailed with a wanton weed,  
 Gives birth to a brawling brook, that passing lightly  
 Adown a natural stair of tangled roots  
 Is presently received in a sweet grave  
 Of eglantines, a place of burial  
 Far lovelier than its cradle.

(I, 508-520)

As the hero of Maud says in the guilt of his own yearnings:

Always I long to creep  
 Into some still cavern deep,  
 There to weep, and weep, and weep  
 My whole soul out to thee.

(Part II, 235-238)

Both heroes yearn for incest and death in the Eden of childhood  
 where "soul and heart and body are all at ease." The only future  
 which Julian can understand is the past.

Instead of seeking the "reflex of action," the overwrought  
 hero seeks to make the present into the past through waking visions:

It was ill-done to part you, sisters fair;  
 Love's arms were wreath'd about the neck of Hope,  
 And Hope kiss'd Love, and Love drew in her breath  
 In that close kiss, and drank her whisper'd tales.  
 They said that Love would die when Hope was gone,  
 And Love mourn'd long, and sorrow'd after Hope;  
 At last she sought out Memory, and they trod  
 The same old paths where Love had walk'd with Hope,  
 And Memory fed the soul of Love with tears.

(I, 802-810)

In his madness, Julian tears at the ivy at the mouth of the cave and  
 dreams of Camilla's death. The second and third parts of the poem





are undisguised wish-fulfillment, frustrated, as we should expect, by the intervention of the ambiguous father-figure, Lionel. He is at once the "low-voiced" and "tender-spirited" Lionel, and worse than the "ghastliest phantom/That ever lusted for a body, /sucking the foul stream of the grave for it." Julian seeks the approval of Lionel while despising him as a sexual rival. During the first imagined funeral procession Julian confesses his love for Camilla to Lionel, who pushes him away and whose piercing look leaves the hero utterly helpless. Predictably, the second dream is as unsuccessful as the first. The lovers merge with their own painting of a ship in a storm, and are whirled down into the depths until Julian casts the empty phantom of Camilla from him and sinks alone "thro' the dark ever and ever." In Julian's third vision, the four bells which toll for the death of Camilla also ring for her marriage, and the death-marriage becomes a mad bacchanal in which Camilla springs from her bier in a wedding gown, a "death-like chrysalis." But the vision is again destroyed when Lionel steps forward and takes Camilla from Julian. Significantly, the poem breaks off at this point.

Obviously the only means of continuing the poem is to continue repeating the dream of Julian's union with his mother, a situation both aesthetically and psychologically unsatisfactory. The conflicts which could not be solved in the poetry of the youthful Tennyson were, how-





ever, resolved in the late sequel, "The Golden Supper." Just as Julian desires, the visions of the death of Camilla become a reality in the later poem. Through the negligence of Lionel, Camilla is actually buried, only to be rescued from her crypt by Julian. She demands to be returned to Lionel in spite of his oversight, and the hero voluntarily complies, thus effecting the belated atonement with the father. Camilla calls Lionel's child, to which she gives birth shortly after her rescue, Julian. The child is the symbol of potential futurity and seems to symbolize a new beginning for the older Julian. The poems which intervene between "The Lover's Tale" and "The Golden Supper" can be seen as stages in the progressive resolution of the Oedipal situation.

Like "The Lover's Tale," Tennyson's most successful early poetry centres on the reality of infantile memories, memories which are always more meaningful than the confrontation with actuality. The "Ode to Memory" and the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" illustrate the aesthetic power of the descent into the unconscious. The high-born maiden isolated in her garden tower is the anima, to quote Buckley's comment on Guinevere, Tennyson's essential aesthetic self.<sup>3</sup> In the "Ode to Memory," the "dewy dawn of memory" comes



Even as a maid, whose stately brow  
The dew-impearled winds of dawn have kiss'd,  
                    When she, as thou,  
Stays on her floating locks the lovely freight  
Of overflowing blooms, and earliest shoots  
Of orient green, giving safe pledge of fruits,  
Which in wintertide shall star  
The black earth with brilliance rare.

(13-20)

In the garden of memory, there is a participation mystique between the speaker and the landscape: spring and autumn, morning and evening, conception and fulfillment continuously alternate. The speaker invokes Memory:

Whilome thou camest with the morning mist,  
And with the evening cloud,  
Showering thy gleaned wealth into my open breast;  
Those peerless flowers which in the rudest wind  
                    Never grow sere,  
When rooted in the garden of the mind,  
Because they are the earliest of the year.  
Nor was the night thy shroud.  
In sweet dreams softer than unbroken rest  
Thou leddest by the hand thine infant Hope.  
                                    (21-30)

Memory is a place of relaxation on the bosom of the beneficent mother: "Small thought was there of life's distress." Because it lies in the maternal depths of the unconscious, Tennyson's aesthetic self can as easily stagnate as inspire the imagination; the two complementary aspects of aesthetic self-indulgence are treated in the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" and in "Mariana."

In the "Recollections" the "forward-flowing tide of time" flows





back to the timeless, nocturnal, and aesthetic paradise of infancy, where the garden of art replaces the "hollow-vaulted dark" of external nature.

The fourscore windows all alight  
 As with the quintessence of flame,  
 A million tapers flaring bright  
 From twisted silvers look'd to shame  
 The hollow-vaulted dark, and stream'd  
 Upon the mooned domes aloof.  
 (122-127)

The strategy of the "Recollections" suggests that the dreamer regresses to the very deepest levels of the unconscious, to "another night in night" beyond even the slow movement of the river to a static lake. The dream within the dream, the regressive image, is totally independent of external reality, for the "imprisoning sweets" of the garden-pavilion are enclosed beneath a womb-like dome of branches where growth and decay, the vase and the urn complement one another. In the garden the opposites are united: the "living airs of the middle night" sing

something which possess'd  
 The darkness of the world, delight,  
 Life, anguish, death, immortal love,  
 Ceasing not, mingled, unrepress'd,  
 Apart from place, withholding time,  
 But flattering the golden prime  
 Of good Haroun Alraschid.  
 (71-77)

Because the unconscious deliberately depreciates its deeper impulses by dreaming that they are only a dream, the dreamer of the



"Recollections" experiences no painful awakening from his indulgence in blissful intrauterine existence.

Mariana in her moated grange is the fair Persian aroused from her dream world. The complementary aspect of the garden-pavilion is the wasteland and the deserted house. Waking pain is more acute by its contrast with sleeping pleasure, an ambiguity in imaginative self-indulgence perhaps suggested to Tennyson by Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." Tennyson seems to echo Keats's paradise-wasteland contrast in the early poem "Memory":

Blesséd, curséd, Memory,  
 Shadow, Spirit as thou may'st be,  
 Why hast thou become to me  
 A conscience dropping tears of fire  
 On the heart, which vain desire  
 Vexeth all too bitterly?  
 When the wand of circumstance  
 All at once hath bid thee glance,  
 From the body of the Past,  
 Like a wandering ghost aghast,  
 Why wearest thou, mad Memory,  
 Lip and lip and hair and eye,  
 Life -- life without life or breath,  
 Death forth issuing from Death?  
 . . . . .  
 Wherefore do I so remember  
 That Hope is born of Memory  
 Nightly in the house of dreams?  
 But when I wake, at once she seems  
 The faery changeling wan Despair,  
 Who laughs all day and never speaks --  
 O dark of bright! O foul of fair!  
 A frightful child with shrivelled cheeks.





"Mariana" illustrates the stagnation of the aesthetic self trapped in the unconscious, a state which is only hinted at in the "Ode to Memory," for there the speaker of the ode invokes the favourable aspects of memory:

Come not as thou camest of late,  
 Flinging the gloom of yesternight  
 On the white day, but robed in soften'd light  
 Of orient state.  
 (8-11)

In "Mariana" the images of the "Recollections" are used in their negative aspect: the pavilion becomes a ruined house; the timeless garden a wasteland of eternal clocktime; the clear lake, a stagnant moat. Just as the landscape of the "Recollections" reflects the fair Persian, the landscape of "Mariana" reflects its principal's unseen face. Her conscious counterpart, the neurotically split Angelo, abandons her because she provokes unacceptable desires, an abandonment which symbolizes resistance to incest. Like Tennyson's later masculine figures, the speaker of Maud and Lancelot in the Idylls, Angelo is a paradoxical combination of excessively strict morality and totally uncontrollable sexual desire. The impossible love relationship between Angelo and Mariana is a symbol of the opposition of conscious and unconscious which ultimately leads to total stagnation.

The archetypal pattern of regression and incest which informs





Tennyson's early poems on art culminates in "The Hesperides."

The reader stands together with Zidonian Hanno and his mariners on the threshold of the unconscious: the voices of the Hesperides come "like the voices in a dream." Hercules' threatened theft of the golden apple symbolizes the incipient invasion of the unconscious by the conscious, and the capture of psychic energy attached to the mother which, given to civilization, would heal the fragmented waking world:

Father Hesper, Father Hesper, watch, watch, night and day,  
Lest the old wound of the world be healed,  
The glory unsealed,  
The golden apple stol'n away,  
And the ancient secret revealed.  
(68-72)

Father Hesper seems to be a symbol of the spirit which attempts to prevent the violation of its sacred and secret world.

Father Hesper and his daughters appear to be decompositions of the dragon, for without the vigilance of the father and the singing of the daughters the dragon would fall asleep, the apple would be stolen, and the paradise destroyed:

If he waken, we waken,  
Rapidly levelling eager eyes.  
If he sleep, we sleep,  
Dropping the eyelid over the eyes.  
If the golden apple be taken,  
The world will be overwise.  
Five links, a golden chain, are we,  
Hesper, the dragon, the sisters three,  
Bound about the golden tree.  
(59-67)



The "red-combed dragon" seems to be a negative mother image signifying fear of incest: as long as the dragon wakes, the mother withholds psychic energy from Hercules and thus from consciousness.

The symbolic relationships of the apple are complex. It is a symbol of the "wisdom of the west," the creative energy of the sun poised at the moment before it sinks into the rejuvenating maternal sea:

But when the full-faced sunset yellowly  
 Stays on the flowering arch of the bough,  
 The luscious fruitage clustereth mellowly,  
 Golden-kernelled, golden-cored,  
 Sunset-ripened above on the tree,  
 The world is wasted with fire and sword,  
 But the apple of gold hangs over the sea.  
 (99-105)

As the sea rejuvenates the sun, so does it nurture the apples. Furthermore, because they come from a tree whose fertility is emphasized, we may infer that the creative energy of the apples is synonymous with the sexual energy attached to the mother. These apples possess all of the qualities which this attachment connotes: their theft would presumably restore the warring eastern world to paradise. But this attachment exists only in memory and hence only in art, for without the song the apple tree could not blossom or bear fruit:

For the blossom unto threefold music bloweth;  
 Evermore it is born anew;  
 And the sap to threefold music floweth,





From the root  
 Drawn in the dark,  
 Up to the fruit,  
 Creeping under the fragrant bark,  
 Liquid gold, honeysweet, thro' and thro'.  
 Keen-eyed Sisters, singing airily,  
 Looking warily  
 Every way,  
 Guard the apple night and day,  
 Lest one from the East come and take it away.  
 (30-42)

As long as the dreamer does not awaken, he can indulge himself in his infantile desires. The reader, like the dreaming Hanno, is tempted into a light state of trance, forcing an introversion of psychic energy and lulling the conscious mind asleep: "Round about all is mute." In effect, the poem creates the paradise about which the Hesperides sing. Therefore the rhythm must not falter, or the trance will fail and the paradise will be destroyed:

If ye sing not, if ye make false measure,  
 We shall lose eternal pleasure,  
 Worth eternal want of rest.  
 (23-25)

With respect to the hypnotic effect which the poem exercises on the reader, it is significant that the structure of the poem is circular; it ends where it begins.

Instead of emphasizing the heroic incest of Hercules, which symbolizes the capture of the energy of sense (the maternal unconscious) by conscience, Tennyson emphasizes the perspective of Hanno



(and the reader) who remains on the threshold of the dream world. The supreme heroic act must remain undone, for the dreamer does not have the conscious strength to make the dream a reality.

The psychological basis of Tennyson's aesthetic of sense, particularly evident in "The Hesperides," explains why the development of a comprehensive moral aesthetic was so difficult and essential. Because heroic incest is clearly impossible, the dreamer is left to explore two possibilities. On the one hand, he can indulge in introverted dream fantasies; and alternately, when the guilt resulting from such indulgence grows too great, he can affirm an ideal of conscience which, because it must exclude dream fantasy, must necessarily lead to stagnation. Such is the dilemma explored in "The Lady of Shalott" and the poems of Tennyson's early maturity.



## CHAPTER III

### 1832 AND 1842: THE POEMS ON ART

In the poems of the 1832 and 1842 volumes, Tennyson juxtaposes the poetry of dream fantasy and the poetry of the waking imagination. I have shown in the last chapter that the aesthetic of sense has a complex psychological basis which almost precludes accommodation to a moral aesthetic. The marriage of these contrasting aesthetic perspectives, which Hallam thought "hardly probable," is the concern of the poems to be considered in this chapter.

"The Lady of Shalott" depicts the pain of the birth of the prophet-poet from the womb of introverted dream fantasy. Although the traditional assertion that the poem concerns the conflict of illusion and reality<sup>1</sup> contains an element of truth, this interpretation seems to me to be misleading because it fails to acknowledge that the world perceived through the mirror is more vivid than the direct apprehension of reality. "The Lady of Shalott" concerns the conflict between two very different but equally meaningful "realities": aesthetic self-absorption on the uroboric island of Shalott, and a cosmic vision of Lancelot and "many-tower'd Camelot." If the lady lives in a world of unreal illusion, as the traditional inter-





pretation implies, there would be no difficulty in leaving the tower.

On the contrary, the curse is the result of maladjustment caused by the very reality of the lady's illusions.

That Lancelot is the Lady of Shalott's spiritual masculinity or consciousness is implied in the imagery suggesting his cosmic proportions:

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,  
Like to some branch of stars we see  
Hung in the golden Galaxy.

. . . . .

All in the blue unclouded weather  
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,  
The helmet and the helmet-feather  
Burn'd like one burning flame together,  
As he rode down to Camelot;  
As often thro' the purple night,  
Below the starry clusters bright,  
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,  
Moves over still Shalott.

(81-99)

Like a meteor in the night, Lancelot's coming portends disaster to the lady; she finds herself inexorably drawn, through her need for love, to her own destruction in a cosmic world where she has no place. She is to be born into the world of opposites:

But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights,  
For often thro' the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights  
And music, went to Camelot;  
Or when the moon was overhead,  
Came two young lovers lately wed:  
'I am half sick of shadows,' said  
The lady of Shalott.

(64-73)



Lancelot as a "red-cross knight" is representative of holiness or conscience and probably the reality principle as well, all of which make the introverted world of dream fantasy intolerable, while themselves remaining tantalizingly aloof.

When the curse comes upon the Lady of Shalott, east and west, summer and autumn, birth and death are separated: she is stillborn into the wasteland of experience. She floats down the river in an autumn evening like "some bold seer in a trance," a prophet-poet like Plato's dying swan, the ordained minister of the gods willingly embracing death. To embrace death willingly is the only answer, for sense and conscience can exist neither in isolation from one another nor together.

Introverted withdrawal from the larger human world is explored somewhat less successfully in "The Palace of Art," where the problem of sense and conscience is solved not by tragedy as in "The Lady of Shalott," but by an almost mechanical insistence that the two realities can co-exist. What is evil about the palace of art is the sterile artifice to which all human endeavour has been reduced. Conscience revolts against the haughty rule of sense, and the guilty Soul becomes "a spot of dull stagnation, without light/Or power of movement." When the restraints which order the personality are denied, the introverted consciousness breeds its own nightmare of





guilt:

But in dark corners of her palace stood  
 Uncertain shapes; and unawares  
 On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood,  
 And horrible nightmares,

And hollow shades enclosing hearts of flame,  
 And, with dim fretted foreheads all,  
 On corpses three-months-old at noon she came,  
 That stood against the wall.

(237-244)

Tennyson exploits the potentially ironic contrast between the puerility of the "cottage in the vale" and the esoteric self-indulgence of the palace in the calculated bathos of the two Locksley Halls and Maud, where the heroes, like the sinful soul, scorn themselves and then laugh at their own self-scorn. The relationship of sense and conscience is more intimate than the vagueness and simplicity of the allegory in "The Palace of Art" implies. The lack of an effective contrast between the Soul's self-indulgence and the vulgarity of the alternatives precludes an ironic interpretation which would redeem the poem from insipidity.

The puberty myth that is the basis of "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Palace of Art" is expanded in "Oenone" where the coming of sexuality symbolized in the apple disrupts the order of the infantile world. Before the interference of Eris the "abominable" and the disorientation caused by the surge of sexual energy into the world order, the vale of Ida is the loveliest of all the valleys of



Ionian hills. Oenone, daughter of "many-fountain'd Ida" and a river god, is clearly associated with the subterranean world of the womb where nothing is quite aware of itself:

The swimming vapor slopes athwart the glen,  
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,  
And loiters, slowly drawn.

(3-5)

The reader views the judgment from Oenone's point of view, from the cavern in which she lives in a twilight world between sleep and waking. Paris returns to her as if he had been reborn from infantile darkness:

'O mother Ida, harken ere I die.  
Far-off the torrent call'd me from the cleft;  
Far up the solitary morning smote  
The streaks of virgin snow. With down-dropt eyes  
I sat alone; white-breasted like a star  
Fronting the dawn he moved; a leopard skin  
Droop'd from his shoulder, but his sunny hair  
Cluster'd about his temples like a God's.

(52-59)

In rejecting Herè and Pallas, Paris rejects the tyrannical mother and the beneficent mother-consort who, as a symbol of repression, is the perfect complement to masculinity; instead he chooses the negative mother-figure who tempts him with incest. The result is a negation of the values of conscience for which Pallas stands:





Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
 These three alone lead life to sovereign power.  
 Yet not for power (power of herself  
 Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law,  
 Acting the law we live by without fear;  
 And, because right is right, to follow right  
 Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.  
 (142-148)

She is the ideal wedded to the actual:

my vigor, wedded to thy blood,  
 Shall strike within thy pulses, like a God's,  
 To push thee forward thro' a life of shocks,  
 Dangers, and deed, until endurance grow  
 Sinew'd with action, and the full-grown will,  
 Circled thro' all experiences, pure law,  
 Commensure perfect freedom.  
 (158-164)

Pallas is presumably Tennyson's choice as well as Oenone's. When the actual judgment is made, Oenone is confined to a cave beyond the "whispering tuft of oldest pine," symbolic of the alienation of the infantile unconscious caused by the coming of puberty.

I have suggested in my explication of "Mariana" that Angelo's rejection of Mariana is a function of his resistance to incest. Paris, like Lancelot in the Idylls, willingly embraces a negative mother image, negating Pallas's "pure law" and alienating himself from the creative aspects of his own maternal unconscious.

The fact that Oenone, like the Lady of Shalott, is a persona of the poet is crucial in view of the ironic echo of Wordsworth in the last lines of the poem. Oenone says that she does not know what Cas-





sandra's visions mean,

but I know  
That, whereso'er I am by night and day,  
All earth and air seem only burning fire.  
(262-264)

These lines echo, of course, Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality":

It is not now as it hath been of yore; --  
Turn wheresoe'er I may  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.  
(6-9)

The divine reason and calm achieved in the contemplation of lost childhood, which is worshipped in the fane of Wordsworth, is hardly possible to Tennyson's Oenone. In "Oenone" the paradise of childhood passes, leading not to the "philosophic mind" of the adult, but to unrepressed incest and alienation from the positive aspects of the maternal. Tennyson's heroes find Wordsworthian sublimation of sexual impulses in conscience and duty essential, but virtually impossible. Paris's inability to transfer his affection from Oenone to Pallas is a symbol of his inability to wed reason and passion, or in terms of the earlier poetry, sense and conscience.

That Paris's choice of Aphrodite alienates him from those things for which Oenone, as beneficent anima, stands is clearly shown in "The Death of Oenone," where Tennyson shows the "Heaven [which] lies about us in our infancy" turned into a winter wasteland



haunted by destructive chthonic powers. Tennyson uses Oenone's ancient significance as a vine spirit to symbolize the transformation of herself and Mount Ida:

the goodly view  
Was now one blank, and all the serpent vines  
Which on the touch of heavenly feet had risen,  
And gliding through the branches overbower'd  
The naked Three, were wither'd long ago,  
And thro' the sunless winter morning-mist  
In silence wept upon the flowerless earth.

And while she stared at those dead cords that ran  
Dark thro' the mist, and linking tree to tree,  
But once were gayer than a dawning sky  
With many a pendent bell and fragrant star,  
Her Past became her Present, and she saw  
Him, climbing toward her with the golden fruit,  
Him, happy to be chosen Judge of Gods,  
Her husband in the flush of youth and dawn,  
Paris, himself as beauteous as a God.

(3-18)

Paris returns to Oenone "like the wraith of his dead self" seeking to be healed of his fatal wound. The birth of Paris's manhood is abortive, and he returns to Oenone seeking a rebirth which only she, as the type of the beneficent mother, can provide; but she has since been transformed from an image of the life-giving maternal into a devouring Fatima. Her only desire is to annihilate time and to possess him as she once had. The "trembling stars" and the vision of fire engulfing Troy, with which "Oenone" ends, suggest a final consummation of their love in total destruction.

Tennyson fuses the images of the burning Troy, Paris's pyre,





and the lurid red blaze of the sunset, suggesting a universal upsurge of destructive sexual energy. The destruction of civilization in the Oenone poems suggests a comparison with the early poem, "Armageddon," where universal cataclysm is symbolized by the conjunction of the sun and the moon in "the bloody haze" of evening. In psychological terms, Armageddon, like the final marriage in fire in "The Death of Oenone," is a marriage of the forces of heaven and hell, of conscious and unconscious in the moment of their mutual destruction. Naturally enough, Armageddon is symbolized by orgasm and death. The final impasse in the war of sense against the soul of man is symbolized by variants of the Armageddon motif in "The Lotus-Eaters," the "Morte d'Arthur," "The Passing of Arthur," and Part III of Maud.

In "The Lotus-Eaters" Tennyson explores the results of the attempted co-existence of sense and conscience so as to circumvent the inexorable logic of Paris's choice. In the hypnotic poetry itself, Tennyson incarnates the delicately poised tension between the sailors' responsibilities as men, and their desire to immerse themselves in the dream world. The "Choric Song" belongs to the trance-like state somewhere between sleep and waking:



How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,  
 With half-shut eyes ever to seem  
 Falling asleep in a half-dream!  
 . . . . .  
 To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
 To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;  
 To muse and brood and live again in memory,  
 With those old faces of our infancy  
 Heap'd over with a mound of grass,  
 Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!  
 (99-113)

The enchanted land offers the temptation to regression balanced by an equally strong sense of guilt which precludes any absolute choice between the "barren foam" of the sea and the "creamy spray" of the shore. The result of the conflict between the waking world and the world of dream fantasy is the dissociation of the personality.<sup>2</sup>

A resolution to the dilemma is implied in the two sources of Ulysses myth, The Odyssey and Canto VI of Book II of The Faerie Queene. The sources are closely related since Spenser patterns Guyon, Knight of Temperance, after the Ulysses of Homer; Tennyson's use of the Spenserian stanza in the frame of the poem seems to imply Spenser's elaboration of Ulysses as the type of temperate man. Phaedria, Idle Mirth, tempts the voyaging Guyon to follow the unconscious course of nature in the same way that a plant does:





Behold, O man, that toilsome paines doest take,  
 The flowers, the fields, and all that pleasant growes,  
 How they themselues doe thine ensample make,  
 Whiles nothing enuious nature them forth throwes  
 Out of her fruitfull lap; how, no man knowes,  
 They spring, they bud, they blossome fresh and faire,  
 And deck the world with their rich pompous showes;  
 Yet no man for them taketh paines or care,  
 Yet no man to them can his carefull paines compare.  
 (II, VI, xv)

The same temptations confront Ulysses' men in "The Lotus-Eaters":

Lo! in the middle of the wood,  
 The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud  
 With winds upon the branch, and there  
 Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
 Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon  
 Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
 Falls, and floats adown the air  
 Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,  
 The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,  
 Drops in a silent autumn night.  
 All its allotted length of days,  
 The flower ripens in its place,  
 Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,  
 Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.  
 (70-83)

The hardships and uncertainties of the world, with which Phaedria vainly attempts to lure the voyaging Guyon from his quest, are a better excuse for Ulysses' mariners to avoid the homeward quest. But the god-like quietude of the island forever eludes the mariners, for the memories of the fatherland and the guilt of having ignored the war with evil haunt them. The incantatory rhythm of the "Choric Song" seems to be an attempt to convince themselves that an immersion in blissful infantile memories is more desirable than the





call to duty. That complete immersion is impossible is manifested in the fact that the stanzas of the song alternate between the two points of view. Because Tennyson invokes Spenser's Knight of Temperance, we can assume that the resolution of the problem of sense and conscience lies in temperate action, in an affirmation of the process of the voyage itself. The alternative, regression, is vitiated by guilt which leads to a dissociation of the personality typified in "The Lotus-Eaters." Beneath the mask of weary old age which seeks rest from the "perpetual moan" of "ever climbing up the climbing wave" lurks the infantile fear of confronting the broken order of the world.

In "Edwin Morris" the neurotic opposition of conscious and unconscious forces is evident in the character of its artist-narrator. His desire to capture the unconscious forces underlying his artistic ability is symbolized by his entrance into the forbidden garden of childhood where Letty, the maternal anima, awaits him. The attitudes of the three men toward women suggest three attitudes toward the unconscious. The "fat-faced curate" Edward Bull is a combination of patriarchal legalism and, as his name suggests, tyrannical sexuality: he says,

Man is made of solid stuff  
I say, God made the woman for the man,  
And for the good and increase of the world.  
(49-51)



Like Lionel in "The Lover's Tale," Bull is a tyrannical father-figure who as a symbol of repression represents the reality principle in all its unimaginative vulgarity. Significantly, Bull is ignored, and attention focused on Edwin Morris, the "full-cell'd honeycomb of eloquence," whose feminine-centred ideals wholly derive from his intercourse with the unconscious. Morris is a complete aesthete, "All perfect, finish'd to the finger-nail," and his poetry is "elaborately good." The feminine principle motivates his art:

'My love for Nature is as old as I;  
 But thirty moons, one honeymoon to that,  
 And three rich sennights more, my love for her.  
 My love for Nature and my love for her.  
 Of different ages, like twin-sisters grew,  
 Twin-sisters differently beautiful.  
 To some full music rose and sank the sun,  
 And some full music seem'd to move and change  
 With all the varied changes of the dark,  
 And ether twilight and the day between;  
 For daily hope fulfill'd to rise again  
 Revolving toward fulfilment, made it sweet  
 To walk, to sit, to sleep, to wake, to breathe.'

(28-40)

Morris' ideals strike the sardonic narrator as having "a touch of something false, some self-conceit, /Or over-smoothness." The speaker's faith, though not his practice, runs into that of Edwin Morris for the speaker is a mere sketcher. Behind the narrator's ironic pose lies a sense of his own inability to love:





'T is from no want in her;  
 It is my shyness, or my self-distrust,  
 Or something of a wayward modern mind  
 Dissecting passion.

(85-88)

His dilemma is the result of his inability to affirm either the ideals of Bull or of Morris. He finds himself somewhere between the wholly masculine ideal of repression and the infantile indulgence of Morris.

"The Lake" which sub-titles the poem is a variant of the "moated grange" motif, and is a symbol of the enclosing uroboric womb where the speaker is helpless to prevent the theft of his Proserpina by a bourgeois Pluto. Indeed, he wants the love relationship to fail, for given the maternal significance of Letty and hence the incestuous nature of the speaker's desires, it would be fatal for the romance to succeed. Significantly, the narrator rationalizes the failure by criticizing the social conventions which "sin against the strength of youth,"<sup>3</sup> a kind of rationalization which is common in Tennyson's later poetry.

Letty, like her earlier prototypes, exists only in memory and thus only in art: she is the speaker's only means of reliving the "fresh days," "For in the dust and drouth of London life/She moves among [his] visions of the lake." The sketch which he presents to the reader at the beginning of the poem is a picture of the



blissful paradise from which he has been exiled.

The love relationship whose motivation is the indulgence of regressive desires also dominates "The Gardener's Daughter or, The Pictures." The artist-narrator is Tithonus, at "a distance from [his] youth in grief." Beneath the mask of the aged man's yearning for his lost youth and love lurks a child's guilty desire to return to the security of the infantile world dominated by the all-beneficent mother.

"The Gardener's Daughter" portrays the full psychological motivation of the aesthetic attitude. Eustace is an Edwin Morris perfectly at home in his aesthetic art, and a "brother in art" to the reticent and self-conscious speaker. Half in earnest, half in jest, the artist-to-be affirms that art is the work of love:

"T is not your work, but Love's. Love, unperceived,  
A more ideal artist he than all,  
Came, drew your pencil from you, made those eyes  
Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair  
More black than ashbuds in the front of March.'

(24-28)

Instead of mocking the aesthetic artist, as does the speaker of "Edwin Morris," the narrator of "The Gardener's Daughter" attempts to emulate the aesthete, Eustace, whose relationship to Juliet is that of perfect artist and muse, a model for the reticent speaker's artistic and human ambitions.





Like the Lady of Shalott in her garden-tower, Rose, the gardener's daughter, dwells in a paradisaal garden on the periphery of the human world:

Not wholly in the busy world, not quite  
Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love.  
News from the humming city comes to it  
In sound of funeral or of marriage bells.  
(33-36)

Like the beneficent anima-figures in Tennyson's early poetry, Rose dwells in a garden associated with east and west simultaneously, clearly an image of the womb where the opposites are still one. But the picture of the lovers "mutually enfolded" in a springtime world exists only in "the orbit of the memory." Although no explanation for the failure of the love is given, we can assume that the reasons are the same as those which I have noted in "Edwin Morris," that the coming of puberty deprives the son of his sexual attachment to his mother, an attachment which can be made to live again only in art.

In the companion poems "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," Tennyson juxtaposes the polar tensions in his imaginative universe through the figure of the archetypal spirit-father. Jung cautions the interpreter to examine with care the context in which the archetype occurs in order to determine whether the spirit-father acts as a genuine guide or as the infantile shadow masquerading as a spiritual au-





thority.<sup>4</sup> Something of this ambiguity informs "Ulysses" and "Tithonus."

That Tithonus asks for and is granted immortality disguises his choice of eternal childhood, a choice which attempts to negate time:

thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,  
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,  
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd  
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,  
Immortal age beside immortal youth,  
And all I was in ashes.

(18-23)

Behind the mask of age, an old man's longing for his lost youth, lurks the youth's desire for the secure world of childhood. Alienated from his vision of the ineffable beauty of the eternally self-renewed mother of childhood, he laments:

Ay me! ay me! with what another heart  
In days far-off, and with what other eyes  
I used to watch -- if I be he that watch'd --  
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw  
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;  
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood  
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all  
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,  
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm  
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds  
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd  
Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet.

(50-61)

Having awakened from his infantile dream, Tithonus longs for death and rebirth in the maternal earth as the only answer to the



intolerable burden of consciousness:

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East;  
 How can my nature longer mix with thine?  
 Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold  
 Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet  
 Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam  
 Floats up from those dim fields about the homes  
 Of happy men that have the power to die,  
 And grassy barrows of the happier dead.  
 Release me, and restore me to the ground.  
 Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave;  
 Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn,  
 I earth in earth forget these empty courts,  
 And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

(64-76)

Tithonus' sorrow is a function of guilt for self-indulgence in introverted dream fantasy which alienates him forever from the adult world. Only under the mask of age can such desires be made acceptable to the conscious, and then only under almost intolerable remorse which apparently masks the self-reproach of conscience.

Ulysses, like Tithonus, is not a true spirit-father, but a variant of the infantile shadow complementing the attributes for which Tithonus stands. Ulysses' exile is a symbol of the adolescent's attempted repression of infantilism while fearing the confrontation of the broken order of civilization:

It little profits than an idle king,  
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
 Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
 I cannot rest from travel; I will drink  
 Life to the lees.

(1-7)





That the effort required to voyage to the west can achieve no results masks the fact that no objective must be reached:

all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
(19-21)

The unending process of sublimation in personal experience is the price of Ulysses' abandonment of the values of collective consciousness represented by Telemachus:

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle, --  
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill  
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild  
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
Of common duties, decent not to fail  
In offices of tenderness, and pay  
Meet adoration to my household gods,  
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.  
(33-43)

That the voyage disguises an adolescent's fear of commitment to anything beyond his own ego can be inferred from a comparison of "Ulysses" and "The Holy Grail." Lancelot's frantic search for the Grail is motivated, among other things, by his desire to sublimate his attachment to Guinevere and to be reborn through the spiritual womb of the holy cup. In terms of my interpretation of "Ulysses," Arthur as a later type of Telemachus views the quest as his knights' attempt to evade their responsibilities to the society



kingdom. Ulysses' vision of the gleam of the untravelled world has a similar meaning. Only in Arthur does Tennyson successfully combine the attitudes of Ulysses and his son.

In view of what I have said, neither of Tennyson's aged poets possesses full masculinity, a fact particularly evident in Tennyson's use of the sun as a symbol of the spirit. Ulysses follows the course of the sun, but unlike the sun, is uncertain as to whether death or rebirth awaits him in the maternal western sea:

my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
 Of all the western stars, until I die.  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
 (59-64)

Tithonus is the potential phoenix-sun who has dissolved into ashes, never to be reborn. Indeed, it is Eos and not Tithonus who is to be identified with the eternally reborn sun. In "Ulysses" the ideal approaches the masculine-centred world of the adult; and in "Tithonus," the feminine-centred world of childhood. I say "approaches" because neither the masculine nor the feminine spheres exist in isolation. In Tennyson's own terms, the interdependence of sense and conscience leads inevitably to frustration.



Tennyson's later poetry can be seen as his attempt to mediate between the opposing views which I have observed in "Ulysses" and "Tithonus." There is a clear sense of Tennyson's progressive clarification of the dialectic between sense and conscience in the long narrative poems of his maturity. Each of the later poems purports to be a synthesis of all that has gone before. The imagery and archetype of the early poems on art form the basis of Tennyson's mature vision.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRINCESS: TENNYSON'S ATTEMPTED SYNTHESIS

At first sight, The Princess appears to have an archetypal structure very different from that of the earlier poems. I shall argue that a close examination of the imagery and archetype of the poem shows that the poem embodies the particular Tennysonian myth, and that the vagaries of the narrative represent a major attempt on Tennyson's part to integrate different perspectives on this basic archetype. The chief difficulty of the poem is that Tennyson's secondary elaboration of the archetype is a deceptive rationalization. The "message" or overtly philosophical aspect of The Princess is at odds with the archetype which bears it, so that the supposed theme

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink  
together; dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free  
(VII, 243-244)

disguises the deeper organizing principle of the poem.

In The Princess Tennyson attempts to fuse two mutually exclusive elements of his poetic vision: the ironic aspect of "Edwin Morris" and the florid, one-dimensional style of "The Gardener's Daughter," as well as the psychological correlatives of each. In the former, the ironic aspect is a function of the speaker's resist-



ance to incest; and the elaborate artifice of "The Gardener's Daughter" is a means to the imaginative fulfillment of forbidden infantile impulses. The psychological objectives of the poems contrast with one another, suggesting that Tennyson's attempt to merge the ironic Cyril and the child-like Florian into the Prince is an impossible task.

The decomposition of the main characters having some of the attributes of their larger originals reflects Tennyson's attempted synthesis of contrasting psychological elements, elements which are most evident in "Edwin Morris" and "Oenone." In the former, the speaker identifies himself with the youthful aesthete, Edwin Morris, just as the effeminate Prince identifies with Florian, whom the Prince calls "my other heart, / And almost my half-self, for still we moved / Together, twinn'd as horse's ear and eye." (54-56) Cyril is the equivalent of the sardonic narrator of "Edwin Morris," and for the first half of The Princess dominates his companions. As in the earlier idyll, the authoritarian Edward Bull remains virtually unacknowledged in the figures of the Prince's father and Arac. All three are tyrannical father-figures:

Man is the hunter; woman is the game,  
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,  
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;  
They love us for it, and we ride them down.  
(V, 146-150)





That the predatory father remains unrecognized by the youthful Prince is the central fact of the archetypal structure of The Princess, for the Prince quests for his own mother in Ida, and must necessarily do so without the approval of his father. Given this as the basis of the love relationship, its successful consummation must depend upon a mechanical distortion of the logic of the archetype. The three women in The Princess correspond to the three versions of the animus which I have noted in "Edwin Morris," and to the aspects of the anima in "Oenone." Blanche is the white goddess Herè whose interests are power and fame, and Psyche corresponds to the all-beneficent infantile anima, Oenone. The Princess herself is transformed from her likeness to the power-hungry Blanche to an ideal combination of Pallas and Oenone. One curious aspect of The Princess is that Aphrodite is not represented, for she is the negative mother image who tempts the adolescent with incest, an image which is not given full recognition in Tennyson's poetry until Guinevere in the Idylls of the King.

Each of the men is searching for his anima. Cyril's humorous cynicism is a defense against incursion on his private world. He is consciously ironic about his own materialistic interpretation of the difference between substance and shadow:



do I chase  
 The substance or the shadow? will it hold?  
 I have no sorcerer's malison on me,  
 No ghostly hauntings like his Highness. I  
 Flatter myself that always everywhere  
 I know the substance when I see it. Well,  
 Are castles shadows? Three of the? Is she  
 the sweet proprietress a shadow?  
 . . . . .  
 For dear are those three castles to my wants,  
 And dear is sister Psyche to my heart,  
 And two dear things are one of double worth.  
 (II, 386-397)

In contrast to Cyril's cynical realism is the attitude of Florian, who lives securely in the dream world of childhood. His devotion to Melissa, the beneficent and earlier aspect of Blanche, is comparable to the child Paris's love for Oenone. The ironic attitude of the former is a product of resistance to regression, and the latter, complete indulgence in regression. The Prince is a more complicated figure since he is a sort of compromise between the contrasting attitudes of his companions. Since his attitude towards Ida changes within the poem, it can be most satisfactorily explicated in an analysis of the psychological significance of archetype and imagery in the poem.

The garden college is a telescoping of the gardens of "Edwin Morris" and "The Gardener's Daughter," with the mock heroics of the first half of The Princess focusing directly on the ambiguous significance of this particular conjunction. The result is a com-





bination of Dante's inferno in comic form (over the college gate is inscribed "LET NO MAN ENTER IN ON PAIN OF DEATH") and the forbidden garden of the "Recollections." The fusion of the positive and negative aspects of the garden reflects the Prince's ambiguous attitude towards regression.

The Prince's intermittent "mystic seizures" provide an essential clue to the meaning of The Princess, for they occur whenever that which is unacceptable to the conscious threatens to awaken him from the dream world of the poem. At each moment of crisis, he automatically depreciates the significance of the situation by temporarily dissociating himself from it. By dreaming that he is dreaming (feeling himself "the shadow of a dream") he objectifies that which would prevent the dream from continuing. As I shall show, the "mystic trance" circumvents the central crisis situations of the poem, the successful transference of the anima from her garden world, and the fight with the tyrannical father. These situations remain unresolved in early poems like "The Lover's Tale" and "Edwin Morris," and are most fully treated in Maud and the Idylls of the King.

The journey into the southern kingdom is commenced against the will of the Prince's father and represents a desertion of conscience and the reality principle for the world of infantile dreams.





Passing towards the south, the Prince crosses the threshold into the dream theatre away from the paternal and into the "mother city" of Gama's kingdom.

When the three men don women's clothing immediately prior to their furtive entrance into the forbidden garden, they symbolically change their identity. In ancient religious ritual the prostitute-priests of the mother goddess donned women's clothing as a symbol of their emasculation, a fact which corroborates my initial assertion that the journey into the matriarchal south is regressive.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the men reveal their true identity on the geological field-trip, the Prince explains his long-standing devotion to Ida, clearly indicating her maternal significance:

My nurse would tell me of you;  
I babbled for you, as babies for the moon,  
Vague brightness; when a boy, you stoop'd to me  
From all high places, lived in all fair lights,  
Came in long breezes rapt from inmost south  
And blown to inmost north; at eve and dawn  
With Ida, Ida, Ida, rang the woods;

. . . . .  
Because I would have reach'd you, had you been  
Sphered up with Cassiopeia, or the enthroned  
Persephone in Hades, now at length,  
Those winters of abeyance all worn out,  
A man I came to see you;

. . . . .  
Let me say but this,  
That many a famous man and woman, town  
And landskip, have I heard of, after seen  
The dwarfs of presage; tho' when known, there grew  
Another kind of beauty in detail  
Made them worth knowing; but in you I found



My boyish dream involved and dazzled down  
 And master'd, while that after-beauty makes  
 Such head from act to act, from hour to hour,  
 Within me, that except you slay me here,  
 According to your bitter statute-book,  
 I cannot cease to follow you, as they say  
 The seal does music; who desire you more  
 Than growing boys their manhood.

(IV, 407-437)

This passage very clearly calls up an adolescent's dependence on his mother. One further indication that the relationship of the Prince to Ida is infantile is offered by Tennyson himself with the addition in later editions of The Princess of several lyrics concerning the relations of children to their parents. Tennyson's apparent desire in adding these poems was to echo the awakening of Ida's maternal instinct. This instinct appears to be directed to children in general, but on closer examination it becomes obvious that the Prince himself is the recipient of her maternal affection. The first of these lyrics, "As thro' the land at eve we went," which is sung immediately after the men are admitted to the academy, acquires immense significance when it is realized that the child "lost in other years" is the Prince himself. At the end of the poem he is, of course, reunited with his parents when he lies wounded and, like a child, totally dependent.

The transformation of Ida from Herè into Oenone commences with her departure on the geological field-trip. To carry the high-born maiden from her isolation in the uroboric garden is a task before





which the Prince, like Tennyson's earlier heroes, falters. The dreaming Prince's strategy is to objectify the threat to the continuance of the dream by dreaming that he is dreaming; the Prince explains:

On a sudden my strange seizure came  
Upon me, the weird vision of our house.  
The Princess Ida seem'd a hollow show,  
Her gay-furr'd cats a painted fantasy,  
Her college and her maidens empty masks,  
And I myself the shadow of a dream,  
For all things were and were not. Yet I felt  
My heart beat thick with passion and with awe.  
(III, 167-174)

Like Oenone's garden on Mount Ida, the encampment on the mountain is a symbol of the infantile world which can only be entered by disparaging the impulse to regress through the device of the "mystic trance." Both the lyric sung by the auditors at the conclusion of the ascent, "The splendor falls on castle walls," and "Tears, idle tears" which is sung by a maiden in the poem, are more sophisticated variants of the early "Ode to Memory." Significantly, Ida's tyranny stems from the fact that she refuses to recognize the past and particularly her betrothal to the Prince, so that in recognizing him she moves towards a recognition of their infantile relationship. Tennyson's attempt to reinvert the masculine and feminine roles in the second half of The Princess is, if we read the symbolism rather than the secondary elaboration of the archetype, totally unsuccessful.



In the second entrance into the forbidden garden, the matriarchal world reveals its devouring aspect with the men as siren-like Eves tempting the intellectual devotion of the feminine Adams. The reversal of roles is particularly evident in the notice which the Prince takes of the statues of Actaeon and Diana, and in Florian's comic concealment under those of Judith and Holofernes. In one of the most important symbolic actions of the poem the Prince finds himself apprehended by Ida's guards after having been tripped by a vine about the foot of Mnemosyne, muse of memory.

In the final episodes of The Princess the Oedipal situation is made explicit. Arac and his brothers are surrogates for the Prince's father, and are clearly identified with Ida; of the warriors

The midmost and the highest  
Was Arac; all about his motion clung  
The shadow of his sister, as the beam  
Of the East, that play'd upon them, made them glance  
Like those three stars of the airy Giant's zone.  
(V, 247-251)

Orion's phallus-sword, to which the Prince here refers, seems to symbolize the power of the tyrannical father. In his encounter with Arac, the Prince fulfills the prophecy that he would come to fight with shadows and would fail; if Arac is a father-surrogate, as I believe he is, then the trance is explained as an attempt to depreciate the impulse to murder the tyrannical father. The Prince's encounter





with Arac has a dream-like quality: he "dreamed of fighting," but is quite unable to master the situation, and at the critical moment falls into a trance:

the blade glanced,  
I did but shear a feather, and dream and truth  
Flow'd from me; darkness closed me and I fell.  
(V, 529-531)

The psychological significance of the crisis circumvented by the regressive image is immediately evident in "Home they brought the warrior dead," where the appearance of the child archetype signifies the rebirth of the dead warrior and complete regression into the infantile situation. The battle ends with the Prince's return to childhood.

Arac, the Prince's father, and Ida are symbolically linked together in the wounding of the Prince. Both indirectly through Arac and as a figure in his own right, the Prince's father is responsible for the injury to his son, for he rises to greet Ida "all dabbled with the blood of his own son." They stand together over the wounded Prince:

My father stoop'd, re-father'd o'er my wounds.  
So those two foes above my fallen life,  
With brow to brow like night and evening mixt  
Their dark and gray, while Psyche ever stole  
A little nearer, till the babe that by us,  
. . . . .  
Lay like a new-fallen meteor on the grass,  
Uncar'd for, spied his mother and began  
A blind and babbling laughter.  
(VI, 113-121)





Furthermore, Psyche's child is identified with the Prince, thus duplicating the situation of the first lyric of The Princess, "As thro' the land at eve we went," where the parents stand over the grave of their dead child. The rather inept punning focuses directly on the psychological significance of the situation. Cyril requests that Ida return Aglaia, one of the graces, to Psyche, forecasting the Princess' own reassumption of the character of the beneficent anima. In the critical moments on the battlefield,

a day

Rose from the distance on her memory,  
 When the good queen, her mother, shore the tress  
 With kisses, ere the days of Lady Blanche.  
 And then once more she look'd at my pale face.  
 (VI, 95-99)

Ida's viper-like aspect falls away when she completely rejects Lady Blanche's influence, leaving the Princess a perfect image of the Prince's mother:

'Alone,' said I, 'from earlier than I know,  
 Immersed in rich foreshadowings of the world,  
 I loved the woman. He, that doth not, lives  
 A drowning life, besotted in sweet self,  
 Or pines in sad experience worse than death,  
 Or keeps his win'd affections clipt with crime.  
 Yet was there one thro' whom I loved her, one  
 Not learned, save in gracious household ways,  
 Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,  
 No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt  
 In angel instincts, breathing Paradise,  
 Interpreter between the gods and men,  
 Who look'd all native to her place, and yet



On tiptoe seem'd to touch upon a sphere  
 Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce  
 Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,  
 And girded her with music. Happy he  
 With such a mother! faith in womankind  
 Beats with his blood. . . '

(VII, 292-310)

In the final episodes of the poem, the Prince ostensibly makes these "rich foreshadowings of the world" into realities; through him, Cyril and Florian appear to be fulfilled. Not only does Ida cast off the Herè aspect of her personality, Tennyson also contrives a sudden conversion of the Prince's father and Arac from enemies into friends. While this mechanical distortion of the logic of the archetype vitiates The Princess, it does indicate the problems which are dealt with more successfully in Maud and the Idylls of the King, where the tyrannical father-figure is fully recognized and indeed dominates the later narratives.

It is sufficiently obvious at this point that the secondary elaboration of the narrative in The Princess is at odds with the archetype. That Tennyson himself recognized something of this difficulty is suggested by the intractability of the poem. Two contradictory attitudes towards the archetype of regression, which Tennyson incarnates in the figures of Cyril and Florian and attempts to fuse in the character of the Prince, are not





reconciled in the "strange diagonal" of the narrative. In Maud the regressive nature of the infantile dream which dominates Tennyson's poetry no longer masquerades under the illusion of a forward transformation and adjustment to the reality principle.



## CHAPTER V

### MAUD: TENNYSON'S SYNTHESIS

Maud is the culmination of an archetypal pattern which had been gestating in Tennyson's imagination since its first conception in the very early poem "The Lover's Tale," indicating that the pattern represented in these poems is more central to Tennyson's poetic life than is generally recognized.<sup>1</sup> Although the problem of sense and conscience appears to be resolved in The Princess, I have shown that a symbolic reading of the poem reveals the Prince's marriage to Ida as a disguise for regression, Displacement acts as a disguise mechanism for the true nature of the speaker's dilemma in Maud in much the same way as it does in The Princess, with this difference, that each impulse to distort is countered by an equally powerful desire to reveal, creating ambiguities which can only be explored by modern depth psychology.

Tennyson's own comments regarding Maud have far-reaching implications for a study of the type I am conducting. According to his son, Tennyson said:

"This poem is a little Hamlet, the history of a morbid poetic soul under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness, an egotist with the makings of a cynic,



raised to sanity by a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven to madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through an unselfishness born of a great passion.<sup>2</sup>

Tennyson's conception of Hamlet appears to be much closer to Freud's neurotic than to Shakespeare's prince, for Maud is concerned with the unsuccessful transformation of its hero from an adolescent into an adult, a failure which can be explained in Freudian terms as a neurotic's unwillingness to accept the incest taboo. The incest taboo and the subscription to those values represented by conscience carries with it the danger of complete alienation from instinct, resulting in a longing for a lost infantile world which manifests itself through symbols of the incestuous situation. Freud's neurotic Prince finds himself unable to act because he sees in Claudius' murder of his father and incestuous marriage with his mother a portrait of his own infantile desires.<sup>3</sup> In Hamlet, the two contrasting elements of the normal ambivalent attitude towards the father are expressed in Hamlet's attitude towards two figures: love and respect for King Hamlet as the beneficent father; and conscious hatred together with unconscious sympathy for Claudius, one paralyzing the force of the other.<sup>4</sup> Tennyson's Hamlet is closer to the latter, to the representation of Hamlet not as avenger, but as the less repressed image of the son who refuses





to repudiate his murder wish.

In Maud Tennyson employs two variants of the Oedipal situation developed in Hamlet. In his psychoanalytical study, Hamlet and Oedipus, Ernest Jones explains that the brother-sister complex of Claudius and Gertrude is duplicated in that of Laertes and Ophelia:

We may summarize [the mythological] aspect of the subject by saying that the main theme of this story is a highly elaborated and disguised account of a boy's love for his mother and consequent jealousy of and hatred towards his father; the allied one in which brother and sister respectively play the same part as father and mother in the main theme is also told, though with subordinate interest.<sup>5</sup>

Tennyson reverses the importance of the main and auxiliary plots of Hamlet, for he was probably unconsciously attracted by the greater degree of repression evident in the distortion of the primary Oedipus archetype into a more acceptable brother-sister-lover triangle. Significantly, the negative aspect of the archetypal feminine, represented by Gertrude in Hamlet, and signifying resistance to incest, remains submerged in Maud. Jones notes that Laertes' attitude towards Ophelia, the positive feminine, is hardly distinguishable from that of Polonius, an aspect of Hamlet which is reproduced in Maud in the identical attitudes of the bestial Sultan and "the grey old wolf" towards Maud. That Maud's brother and father are decompositions of the tyrannical father is evident in Tennyson's invocation of Hamlet in his description of the fatal tryst. Three scenes, Hamlet's interview with his mother in her bed-chamber and his subsequent murder of Polonius,



Ophelia's madness on discovering the murder of her father, and the encounter between Laertes and Hamlet in Ophelia's grave, are telescoped into the garden scene in Maud. In merging these scenes, Tennyson identifies Gertrude with Ophelia and the bed-chamber with the grave, as well as Polonius with Laertes. All of these identifications made by Tennyson are noted by Jones, and suggest that Tennyson unconsciously gave a Freudian reading to Hamlet.<sup>6</sup>

That Tennyson identifies Gertrude's bed-chamber with Ophelia's grave is symbolized in Maud by the hero's identification of the cavern with which the poem begins and Maud's garden, an association which points to the union of incestuous love and death. The madness of Maud, like that of Ophelia, is a symbol of the speaker's alienation from the positive aspects of the archetypal feminine. The horrifying recognition of the madhouse scene comes with the hero's realization that in murdering the Sultan in the garden, he has duplicated the crime of which he accuses Maud's father, that is, the murder of his own father in the cavern. By decomposing the hero's father into Maud's brother, father, and lover, Tennyson is able to develop the speaker's relationship to his father in its fullest ambiguity. The father commits suicide, is murdered by his son, is a rival for Maud's love, and ultimately







survives the son's designs. In the madhouse scene of Maud Tennyson reverses the significance of the grave scene in Hamlet by making it not a contest of affection between the son and the father, but rather a final submission to the father symbolized by the return of Maud to the "old man," and a subsequent subscription to the values of conscience. The speaker's absolute self-abnegation in the public cause is a form of psychological compensation for the guilt engendered by the indulgence of incestuous impulses.

The death of the speaker's father is the central fact of Part I of Maud, for it results in the sudden removal of the incest prohibition and a resurgence of infantile desires hitherto repressed. Repression does not rid the hero of his fantasies, for they appear in a different form, projected on the world around him. His "little world of plunder and prey" is the objective correlative of his own unconscious. Tennyson's Hamlet is obsessed with the cavern because in it he sees the image of his wish to murder his father and commit incest with his mother. His refusal to reject his attachment to his mother manifests itself in his inability to take leave of the animal unconscious. The cavern which dominates Maud is a symbol of the vagina and suggests that the hero identifies sexuality with castration:



I hate the dreaful hollow behind the little wood;  
 Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,  
 The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,  
 And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers "Death."

For there in the ghastly pit long since a body was found,  
 His who had given me life -- O father! O God! was it well? --  
 Mangled, and flatten'd, and crush'd, and dented into the ground;  
 There yet lies the rock that fell with him when he fell.

(Part I, I, i and ii)

The speaker's fear of himself as a self-conscious individual re-appears in his fear of the predatory aspect of nature, for alienated from the blissful security of childhood he can see in life only pain and death.

The infantile situation reactivated by the death of his father determines the nature of any human relationship in which the hero becomes involved; in this sense then, the return of Maud and her brother from abroad is tantamount to the reconstitution of the hero's childhood situation. For this reason, he both desires and fears Maud since she embodies the beauty of a child's perception of his mother as well as the temptation to incest:

Maud, with her venturous climbings and tumbles and  
 childish escapes,  
 Maud, the delight of the village, the ringing joy of the Hall,  
 Maud, with her sweet purse-mouth when my father dangled  
 the grapes,  
 Maud, the beloved of my mother, the moon-faced darling of all, --

What is she now? My dreams are bad. She may bring me  
 a curse..  
 No, there is fatter game on the moor; she will let me alone.

(Part I, I, xviii and xix)





The psychological situation developed in Part I whose components are apparent in the first scene and in Tennyson's invocation of Hamlet, can be most easily viewed as an elaboration of the archetype and imagery of the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights." In the early poem, the paradise of aesthetic self-absorption, closely linked with the dream of regression and incest, replaces the "hollow-vaulted dark" of external nature. The death of his father leaves the hero free to indulge himself in introverted dream fantasy: "I will bury myself in myself, and the Devil may pipe to his own." (Part I, I, xix) The speaker projects onto Maud his desire to return to the womb. She eventually becomes the embodiment of the dream which transforms the cosmos. She first appears as the tyranny which the cold aloofness of the stars exercises on the imagination:

Cold and clear-cut face, why come you so cruelly meek,  
 Breaking a slumber in which all spleenful folly was drown'd?  
 Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek,  
 Passionless, pale, cold face, star-sweet on a gloom profound;  
 Womanlike, taking revenge too deep for a transient wrong  
 Done but in thought to your beauty, and ever as pale as before  
 Growing and fading and growing upon me without a sound,  
 Luminous, gemlike, ghostlike, deathlike, half the night long  
 Growing and fading and growing, till I could bear it no more,  
 But arose, and all by myself in my own dark garden ground,  
 Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar,  
 Now to the scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the wave,  
 Walk'd in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found  
 The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave.

(Part I, III)





Like the fair jewel-like Persian maiden, Maud is the treasure hard to attain lying deep in the unconscious, and accessible only in the dream. The speaker's image of Maud as the prideful starry queen of the night, like the tyrannical Here in "Oenone," is transformed into the image of Maud as a jewel counteracting the tyranny of space and time:

Here will I lie, while these long branches sway,  
 And you fair stars that crown a happy day  
 Go in and out as if at merry play,  
 Who am no more so all forlorn  
 As when it seem'd far better to be born  
 To labor and the mattock-harden'd hand  
 Than nursed at ease and brought to understand  
 A sad astrology, the boundless plan  
 That makes you tyrants in your iron skies,  
 Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,  
 Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand  
 His nothingness into man.

But now shine on, and what care I,  
 Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl  
 The countercharm of space and hollow sky,  
 And do accept my madness, and would die  
 To save from some slight shame one simple girl? --  
 (Part I, XVIII, iv and v)

Maud is the pearl of great price, symbol of the immortality conferred by intercourse with the deepest levels of the maternal unconscious.

In the "Recollections" there is no painful awakening. In Maud the paradise of infantile dreams impinges on the conscious perception of the realities of existence in a wasteland of space and time, re-



sulting in the curiously surrealistic character of much of the imagery. It is as if the waking and sleeping worlds were fused. Eventually the dream replaces the conscious completely:

Yet, if she were not a cheat,  
 If Maud were all that she seem'd,  
 And her smile were all that I dream'd,  
 Then the world were not so bitter  
 But a smile could make it sweet.

(Part I, VI, v)

The result of this fusion is the curious ambiguity of many of the incidents in the poem:

Did I hear it half in a doze  
 Long since, I know not where?  
 Did I dream it an hour ago,  
 When asleep in this arm-chair?

Men were drinking together,  
 Drinking and talking of me:  
 "Well, if it prove a girl, the boy  
 Will have plenty; so let it be."

Is it an echo of something  
 Read with a boy's delight,  
 Viziers nodding together  
 In some Arabian night?

(Part I, VII, i-iii)

All of the questions can be answered in the affirmative simultaneously because the past is eternally present in the unconscious.

The hero's entrance into the forbidden garden symbolizes an attempted fulfillment of his incestuous desires. Lingering at Maud's gate, the hero stands on the threshold of the unconscious where Maud, the treasure hard to attain, dwells:





Maud's own little oak-room --  
 Which Maud, like a precious stone  
 Set in the heart of the carven gloom,  
 Lights with herself, when alone  
 She sits by her music and books  
 And her brother lingers late  
 With a roystering company -- looks  
 Upon Maud's own garden gate.  
 (Part I, XIV, ii)

Since Maud is Ophelia, behind whose image lurks the tempting  
 Gertrude, the garden is a source of life as well as death to those  
 who violate it:

But I look'd, and round, all round the house I beheld  
 The death-white curtain drawn,  
 Felt a horror over me creep,  
 Prickle my skin and catch my breath,  
 Knew that the death-white curtain meant but sleep,  
 Yet I shudder'd and though like a fool of the sleep of death.  
 (Part I, XIV, iv)

Because of the incestuous impulses which motivate it, love is neces-  
 sarily linked with death:

O, why should Love, like men in drinking-songs,  
 Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death?  
 Make answer, Maud my bliss,  
 Maud made my Maud by that long loving kiss,  
 Life of my life, wilt thou not answer this?  
 "The dusky strand of Death inwoven here  
 With dear Love's tie, makes Love himself more dear."  
 (Part I, XVIII, vii)

The garden with which Part I ends is a cumulative image of all  
 the gardens throughout the first section of the poem. Gradually the  
 tenuous innocence of the speaker's relationship with Maud symbo-  
 lized by their "gathering woodland lilies" is merged with a fully



sexual relationship symbolized by the rose. In the tryst scene the equality of the lily and the rose is momentary, just as the twilight when the "planet of Love is on high" is transitional. Quickly "the soul of the rose" passes into the hero's blood, and a desire for possession overwhelms him:

I said to the rose, "The brief night goes  
In babble and revel and wine.  
O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,  
For one that will never be thine?  
But mine, but mine," so I sware to the rose,  
"For ever and ever, mine."  
(Part I, XXII, v)

When Maud appears the rose overwhelms the lily:

My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead,  
Would start and tremble under her feet,  
And blossom in purple and red.  
(Part I, XXII, xi)

The image of the rose is further elaborated to absorb the connotation of the blood lust of murder. The scene of the tryst is, as I have explained, modelled on Hamlet's interview with Gertrude in her chamber and the subsequent murder of Polonius, as well as Hamlet's duel with Laertes in Ophelia's grave. This establishes the link between murder and incest from yet another perspective.

In terms of the "Recollections" the dreamer meets not "the good Haroun Alrachid" at the moment of attempted incest, but his





tyrannical equivalent, the Sultan, who must frustrate the incestuous desires of his son. Tennyson carefully identifies Maud with her brother by describing them both as jewelled and perfumed easterners who combine in themselves the attributes of the lily and the rose:

His face, as I grant, in spite of spite  
Has a broad-blown comeliness, red and white,  
And six feet two, as I think, he stands;  
But his essences turn'd the live air sick,  
And barbarous opulence jewel-thick  
Sunn'd itself on his breast and his hands.

(Part I, XIII, i)

Beneath the hero's mask of contempt is a genuine feeling of inferiority which inspires an irrational hate leading eventually to murder. The speaker's description of the Sultan, "That jewell'd mass of millinery, /That oil'd and curl'd Assyrian bull/Smelling of musk and of insolence," seems to be an attempt to depreciate his own fear. In his murder of the Sultan Tennyson's Hamlet actualizes his sense of guilt for his father's death:

For front to front in an hour we stood,  
And a million horrible bellowing echoes broke  
From the red-ribb'd hollow behind the wood,  
And thunder'd up into heaven the Christless code  
That must have life for a blow.  
Ever and ever afresh they seem'd to grow.  
Was it he lay there with a fading eye?  
"The fault was mine," he whisper'd, "fly!"  
Then glided out of the joyous wood  
The ghastly Wraith of one that I know,  
And there rang on a sudden a passionate cry,  
A cry for a brother's blood;  
It will ring in my heart and ears, till I die, till I die.

(Part I, I, i)





The "shrill-edged shriek of a mother" which divided "the shuddering night" at the discovery of the death of the hero's father is echoed in Maud's "sudden passionate cry" at her brother's death, clearly identifying Maud with the hero's mother and the Sultan with the hero's father. Maud, like Ophelia, goes mad at the moment of her brother's murder, and although not technically dead until much later, is psychologically dead to the hero at that moment.

Of the displacements noted above, the speaker remains largely unconscious until, in the depths of his madness, he identifies the cavern where his father died with the garden where he killed Maud's brother:

But I know where a garden grows,  
 Fairer than aught in the world beside,  
 All made up of the lily and rose  
 That blow by night, when the season is good,  
 To the sound of dancing music and flutes:  
 It is only flowers, they had no fruits,  
 And I almost fear they are not roses, but blood;  
 For the keeper was one, so full of pride,  
 He linkt a dead man there to a spectral bride;  
 For he, if he had not been a Sultan of brutes,  
 Would he have that hole in his side?

But what will the old man say?  
 He laid a cruel snare in a pit  
 To catch a friend of mine one stormy day;  
 Yet now I could even weep to think of it;  
 For what will the old man say  
 When he comes to the second corpse in the pit?  
 (Part II, V, viii and ix)



The image of the roses which seem like blood are identified with the blood-lipped cavern with which Maud begins, suggesting the murderous nature of sexual desires. As the "dead man" at the bottom of the madhouse-grave, the speaker clearly identifies himself with his dead father and Maud's murdered brother, and thus is fittingly punishing himself for his own hostility towards his conscience. Ultimately, the tyrannical father survives in the form of the "old man":

Tell him now: she is standing here at my head;  
Not beautiful now, not even kind;<sup>1</sup>  
He may take her now; for she never speaks her mind,  
But is ever the one thing silent here.

(Part II, V, vii)

In returning Maud to her father, the speaker atones with the father by rejecting his incestuous desires. The question asked by the hero in his madness concerning the Sultan's interruption of the tryst, "Who told him we were there?" can now be answered. The Sultan appears at the critical moment because the speaker wishes him to; the hero's subsequent exile and madness are modes of self-punishment for indulgence in incest. Love must be death because Maud's garden is both Gertrude's bed-chamber and Ophelia's grave.<sup>7</sup>

The transformation of Tennyson's Hamlet from an introvert indulging himself in infantile dream fantasy into a very unwilling extrovert is dramatized in the shell poem early in Part II. As the animal, who once lived in the shell, dwelt in the subterranean world,





so the hero's ego was immersed in the unconscious throughout

Part I:

The tiny cell is forlorn,  
 Void of the little living will  
 That made it stir on the shore.  
 Did he stand at the diamond door  
 Of his house in a rainbow frill?  
 Did he push, when he was uncurl'd,  
 A golden foot or a fairy horn  
 Thro' his dim water-world?

(Part II, II , iii)

His frail ego will remain intact in the invasion of the external world  
 into his isolated consciousness:

Slight, to be crush'd with a tap  
 Of my finger-nail on the sand,  
 Small, but a work divine,  
 Frail, but of force to withstand,  
 Year upon year, the shock  
 Of cataract seas that snap  
 The three-decker's oaken spine  
 Athwart the ledges of rock,  
 Here on the Breton strand!

(Part II, II, iv)

"Void of the little living will," the speaker can live only in  
 the past, for only in memory does Maud, who is life itself, exist.  
 The frustration resulting from the hiatus between the dream of para-  
 dise existing in memory and the waking wasteland of the present  
 haunted by guilt is poignantly dramatized in the germinal lyric of  
Maud, "O that 't were possible":



Half the night I waste in sighs,  
 Half in dreams I sorrow after  
 The delight of early skies;  
 In a wakeful doze I sorrow  
 For the hand, the lips, the eyes,  
 For the meeting of the morrow,  
 The delight of happy laughter,  
 The delight of low replies.

Do I hear her sing as of old,  
 My bird with the shining head,  
 My own dove with the tender eye?  
 But there rings on a sudden a passionate cry,  
 There is some one dying or dead,  
 And a sullen thunder is roll'd;  
 For a tumult shakes the city,  
 And I wake, my dream is fled.  
 In the shuddering dawn, behold,  
 Without knowledge, without pity,  
 By the curtains of my bed  
 That abiding phantom cold!

(Part II, IV, v and vii)

It is the guilt which Maud's phantom inspires which drives the  
 speaker to a neurotic longing for death:

But the broad light glares and beats,  
 And the shadow flits and fleets  
 And will not let me be;  
 . . . . .  
 Always I long to creep  
 Into some still cavern deep,  
 There to weep, and weep, and weep  
 My whole soul out to thee.

(Part II, IV, xiii)

The regret expressed in "O that 't were possible," like that of the  
 earlier "Tithonus," masks an overwhelming sense of guilt.



In the madhouse scene it is apparent that the vicarious death of the adolescent ego is not sufficient to counter those impulses which inspired the hero's love and murder. The only answer to complete dissociation is the repression of self-love and the affirmation of the values of collective consciousness. One thing is effective against inner necessity, and that is harsh outer necessity. Hence, only in action can the speaker's sexual desires be sublimated, and indeed war takes on the specifically sexual significance of the bloody cavern, the rose of love, and the rose which seems like blood:

And now by the side of the Black and the Baltic deep,  
And deathful-grinning mouths of the fortress, flames  
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.

(Part III, iv)

In adopting an extroverted attitude and embracing the public cause in the Crimea, the hero exchanges an obsession motivated by sense for a new obsession sanctified by conscience.





## CHAPTER VI

### ARCHETYPE AND IMAGERY IN THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

The Idylls of the King is a development of the archetype and imagery of Maud in terms of Arthurian myth. Instead of creating a single character to bear the different phases of passion as in Maud, Tennyson returns to more orthodox narrative techniques in the Idylls by making each phase of passion an individual character.<sup>1</sup> In large measure the critical approach which I am taking must be concerned to see in the discontinuous narrative the single archetype which informs the myriad of characters and situations, thus reversing Tennyson's artistic technique and treating the Idylls as a larger and more discontinuous Maud.

What differentiates the Idylls from Maud is the strength of the figure of beneficent authority, Arthur, who is the final form of the father figure whose development dominates much of Tennyson's earlier poetry. Of all Tennyson's heroes, Arthur is the most effective proponent of resistance to and repression of the indulgence in incestuous desires, without, however, exhibiting the tyranny of his earlier prototypes. His nature can be clearly seen in the traditional conception of Arthur as the British representative of "our fair father



Christ," as much a brother as a father to his people. As such, Arthur is the representative of the beneficent super-ego, like Hallam in In Memoriam, "manhood fused with female grace." The feminine image of the round table, symbol of the cosmic unity of Arthur's world, is the most obvious attribution of feminine wholeness to Arthur.

The relationship of King Arthur to Lancelot, like that of Arthur Hallam to the speaker of In Memoriam, bears a strong resemblance to the archetype of the double as immortal self.<sup>2</sup> The two Arthurs are representatives of the spirit and are symbolic brothers to their more human companions. In Tennyson's terms, the relationship of the mortal and immortal brothers is suggested in Maud where Tennyson distinguishes the private and the public man, Lancelot and Arthur respectively in the Idylls, and the speaker and Hallam respectively in In Memoriam. Just as King Arthur represents the masculine divine order, the ethic of social duty incarnate, Lancelot represents the darker half of his spiritual brother, the neurotic private man unable to break his maternal attachments, an egotist trapped in the allurements of sensual indulgence. The pattern manifested in the archetype of the double as immortal self is familiar as the war of sense and conscience.





As Arthur is the representative of the super-ego, Lancelot represents the ego uneasily poised between the super-ego and the id. Lancelot gravitates from Arthur towards Guinevere who, as the "fairest of all flesh on earth," appears to be a representative of the id, or in Jungian terms, the anima. Arthur's unsuccessful marriage to Guinevere symbolizes the unsuccessful union of conscious and unconscious, soul and sense, or from the social perspective, the inability to actualize the Christian ideal in the natural world. Without Guinevere, Arthur says,

I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
And cannot will my will nor work my work  
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,  
Then might we live together as one life,  
And reigning with one will in everything  
Have power in this dark land to lighten it,  
And power in this dead world to make it live.

(86-93)

With her, his efforts are at best only temporarily effective, for Arthur cannot overcome his dark brother Lancelot, and by being unaware of Lancelot's disloyalty is apparently unconscious of his darker self.

As in Maud, Tennyson invokes Hamlet in the Idylls to call attention to the unity and the significance of the archetypal structure. Tennyson's recasting of Hamlet points to the single most obvious characteristic of the development of Tennyson's archetype, that of the progressive affirmation of the beneficent father-figure and the larger im-



plications of this recognition. Correspondingly, the mother-figure appears in a more negative aspect. Bellicent's explanation of the circumstances of Uther's love of and marriage to Ygerne is the first of the allusions to Hamlet, and provides the essential perspective from which to view the development of the Idylls:

And Uther cast upon her eyes of love;  
 But she, a stainless wife of Gorlois,  
 So loathed the bright dishonor of his love  
 That Gorlois and King Uther went to war,  
 And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.  
 Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged  
 Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,  
 Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,  
 Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,  
 And there was none to call to but himself.  
 So, compass'd by the power of the king,  
 Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,  
 And with a shameful swiftness.

(192-204)

From the point of view of the allusion, Uther is the wassailing Claudius; Gorlois, the unfortunate King Hamlet; and Ygerne, a reluctant Gertrude. Insofar as Claudius' actions are the realization of the unconscious desires of Prince Hamlet, Uther is Hamlet as well. The significance of the circumstances of Uther's marriage corresponds roughly to Part I of Maud, from which I infer that the same Oedipal situation lies at the core of the Idylls, with this difference, that the desire for another man's wife is less a distortion of the Oedipus archetype than the brother-sister-lover triangle.





That Arthur is born at the moment of Uther's death implies that he replaces his father. Further, Arthur is Uther reborn. Nor should this seem strange, for according to Jung the miraculous birth of the hero is miraculous because it is really a rebirth in which the hero attempts to become his own father and to be reborn through his mother-consort.<sup>3</sup> In terms of Hamlet, Arthur's former self modelled on the murderous Prince Hamlet-Claudius is to be transformed into the beneficent King Hamlet. Arthur's unswerving allegiance to duty is to be viewed as a compensation for that aspect of himself which resembles his sensual father. In this sense, then, the Idylls commence at the point where Part III of Maud ends, the neurotic hero's recognition of himself as in every way similar to his sensual father and the hero's final atonement through action in the public good. Arthur's subscription to duty, like the resolution of the speaker of Maud, is at best precarious, a fact suggested by the reappearance of the Claudius-Hamlet aspect of Arthur in his more human brother and symbolic son, Lancelot. The Idylls of the King thus follows the typical hero pattern, beginning with the son's replacement of his father and former aspect of himself, and ending with the hero's being murdered in turn by his own son who is his father's former self reborn.





Lancelot's lack of fidelity to Arthur, upon which the Round Table depends, is one of the chief points of weakness in the order. After his victory against the coalition of petty lords in "The Coming of Arthur," Arthur turned to Lancelot and

laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved  
And honor'd most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King,  
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.'  
'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God  
Descends upon thee in the battle-field.  
I know thee for my King!' Whereat the two,  
For each had warder either in the fight,  
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.  
And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man;  
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'  
(124-133)

In the course of the Idylls we see Arthur's trust abused, a development of which I have given my own account above, using Tennyson's invocation of Hamlet. Tennyson himself suggests the more complex nature of Lancelot's relationship to Arthur in "Lancelot and Elaine," where the passage is ostensibly introduced to explain the source of the diamonds, but also functions as an emblem of the relationship of the King and his chief knight.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him king,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
Like its own mists to all the mountain side;  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together, but their names were lost;  
And each had slain his brother at a blow;



And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd.  
 And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,  
 And lichen'd into color with the crags.  
 And he that once was king had on a crown  
 Of diamonds, one in front and four aside,  
 And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,  
 All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
 Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
 Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
 Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims  
 Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn.  
 And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
 And set it on his head, and in his heart  
 Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be king.'  
 (34-55)

We must assume that in the darkness of his infantile past, "long before they crown'd him king," Arthur saw an image of his own fate at the hand of his mortal brother. Together they form a neurotically split personality, one part of which must inevitably attempt to annihilate the other. The horror about the tarn is the shadow lying deep in the unconscious and threatening to emasculate the conscious mind, for the crown stands for the head which is a sort of higher phallus. That Arthur breaks the skull from the nape "unawares" and causes the crown to roll towards the tarn suggests that unconsciously Arthur is an accomplice in the destruction of consciousness, a suggestion which corroborates what I have said about the circumstances of Arthur's birth, or rather, rebirth. The crown with its nine diamonds is a symbol of rebirth and is critical to the interpretation of "Lancelot and Elaine" as well as the Idylls as a





whole, for in Lancelot's gift of them to Guinevere, he symbolically confirms his attachment to his mother. The murmur in Arthur's heart, "'Lo, thou likewise shalt be king,'" (italics added) foreshadows Lancelot's defection and final war with Arthur, which signals the complete collapse of the order and the death of Arthur. The symbolic definition of Lancelot's relationship to Arthur is not without difficulties which must be accounted for. In the sense that Lancelot as the chief of Arthur's knights is a symbol of Arthur's relationship to the physical world, sense itself, and that his sins provide a model for the other knights, he is to be held responsible for Arthur's fall. Both in the general symbolic sense and in the specific sense that without Lancelot's sin Modred could never have usurped Arthur's throne and killed him, Lancelot is Arthur's destroyer. In decomposing Lancelot into several figures, each representing varying degrees of the conflict of sense and conscience, Tennyson achieves two things: he is able through Lancelot to detail the private man's agonizing efforts to follow conscience against his worst inclinations, only to have him achieve a reconciliation which comes too late; and in the figures of the other knights Tennyson is able to dramatize the terrible results of man freed from conscience, results seen in their most extreme form in Modred.

The rivalry between Lancelot and Arthur is presented in mini-



ature in "Balin and Balan" where Balin represents the way of Lancelot, the ego at the mercy of the dark irrationality of the id; and Balan, the way of repression symbolized by Arthur. Infantilism is at the root of Balin's irrationality, for he is compared to a child no less than four times:<sup>4</sup> His frustrated infantile desires, which ultimately reveal themselves to be very much feared incestuous desires, can be sublimated only by the continuing vigilance of Balan, a vigilance similar to that which Arthur exercises over Lancelot. Balan's advice to his brother on leaving to hunt the Horror is that of repression:

'Good my brother, hear!  
 Let not thy moods prevail when I am gone  
 Who used to lay them! hold them outer fiends,  
 Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,  
 Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream  
 That any of these would wrong thee wrongs thyself.  
 (136-141)

Balin's feeling of persecution is the result of guilt for impulses which refuse to be sublimated, and which alienate him from the values of conscience and repression symbolized by ascent. He sighs

as a boy, lame-born beneath a height  
 That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak  
 Sun-flushed or touch at night the northern star;  
 For one from out his village lately climb'd  
 And brought report of azure lands and fair,  
 Far seen to left and right; and he himself  
 Hath hardly scaled with help a hundred feet





Up from the base. So Balin, marvelling oft  
 How far beyond him Lancelot seem'd to move,  
 Groan'd and at times would mutter: 'These be gifts,  
 Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,  
 Beyond my reach. Well had I foughten -- well --  
 In those fierce wars, struck hard -- and had I crown'd  
 With my slain self the heaps of whom I slew --  
 (161-174)

Balin's lameness symbolizes castration by the uroboric womb, a castration which forever prevents the effective sublimation of base human desires which is requisite to adulthood.

When Balin exchanges "Langued gules" for Guinevere's "crown-royal," he is attempting to "live afresh," to be reborn through the beneficent mother. After witnessing the tryst between Lancelot and Guinevere, he castigates himself for excessive prurience, and flies "mad for strange adventures" because he sees in their liaison an image of his own desires. In denying what is ironically the truth, Balin represses his recognition that in the Arthurian ideal itself lies the darkness of sin. At this moment the shadow, eventually identified with Garlon and Vivien, gains control and Balin flies back into the devouring infantile world symbolized by his passing "eastward from the falling sun." His failure to recognize the cavern, symbol of the devouring vagina dentata, as he passes through the forest suggests that he is unconscious of it.





Now with slack rein and careless of himself,  
 Now with dug spur and raving at himself,  
 Now with droopt brow down the long glades he rode;  
 So mark'd not on his right a cavern-chasm  
 Yawn over darkness, where, not far within,  
 The whole day died, but, dying, gleam'd on rocks  
 Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,  
 Tusklike, arising, made that mouth of night  
 Whereout the demon issued up from hell.

(304-312)

Before him, Balin sees two alternatives: perverted asceticism in Pellam's "holy heat" or the unabashed sensuality of Garlon, one alternative the inverse of the other. Both are aspects of the sensual father, and both are, of course, totally unsatisfactory.

Balin's inability to control his horse is a symbol of the threatening usurpation of the id by the conscious and the ideals of order embraced by the ego.<sup>5</sup> His first encounter with the Horror provokes a chase which ends with Balin's bursting his lance on a tree and dishorsing himself. The circumstances of his flight from Pellam's castle are of a similar significance: Balin is dishorsed by the oak which he himself felled for the aged woodsman. The ironies of Balin's situation are obvious in the last scene of the poem where, unbeknownst to himself, Balan recognizes that the Horror is his own brother: "My quest, me-seems, is here." The circumstances of their encounter emphasize the symbolical significance of the horse, for after symbolically castrating Balan with a lance which is said to have



pierced the side of Christ, Balin is crushed beneath his own horse. As the prototype of sense, Balin is crushed beneath the forces of the id, but only after symbolically castrating conscience in his wounding of Balan, and through him, Arthur, the British Christ.

Symbolically, Vivien is correct in her assertion that Balin "hath wrought some foulness with his Queen," for Balin is clearly identified with Lancelot. Balin's neurosis seems to be the result of an obsession with gross sexuality focused on negative parent-figures, Garlon and Vivien, who are said to dally in the "Mouth of Hell." The brothers die together just as Lancelot and Arthur do in the account of the source of the diamonds:

Balan answer'd low,  
 'Good night, true brother, here! good morrow there!  
 We two were born together, and we die  
 Together by one doom: and while he spoke  
 Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep  
 With Balin, either lock'd in either's arm.  
 (615-620)

Clearly, the relationship of Balin and Balan duplicates that of Lancelot and Arthur, and adumbrates many of the complexities which are later developed directly through the actions of the principals.

The internal division which eventually destroys the Arthurian order is only obliquely hinted at in the earlier poems of "The Round Table," for the earlier quests begin in a springtime world of youth and hope where the possibility of the rebirth of the child into the





adult seems imminent. Under two images, escape from the cage and ascent to the skies, Gareth in "Gareth and Lynette" argues the necessity of leaving the secure but potentially enervating womb of childhood. The birth of the man is symbolized by the golden egg perched high in a tree, an image which Gareth explains has the same significance as Arthur's sword, Excalibur. The same danger of castration, symbolized by breaking the neck, haunts the ascent. Through a parable concerned with an unaspiring hero, Gareth explains to his mother the necessity of danger:

But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,  
 One that had loved him from his childhood caught  
 And stay'd him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,  
 I charge thee by my love," and so the boy,  
 Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,  
 But brake his very heart in pining for it,  
 And past away.'

(52-58)

Gareth's escape from his tyrannical parents, first Bellicent and later the symbolic father Sir Kay, is accomplished against their wills. Removing his kitchen cloak and revealing the armour for his quest, Gareth appears like a "flame from ashes,"

like a fuel-smother'd fire  
 That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those  
 Dull-coated things, that making slide apart  
 Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns  
 A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.

(669-673)



The rebirth is not totally effective, for Gareth must defeat parental figures several times later in the poem.

In addition to Bellicent's enervating love, Gareth's quest is shadowed over by Kay's contest with Arthur's authority, the same rivalry between the tyrannical and beneficent fathers which dominates much of Tennyson's poetry. Gareth's rescue of the Baron from the thieves, an act which testifies to Gareth's full commitment to the Arthurian ideal, is belied by his encounter with the knights at Castle Perilous. Having defeated the three knights, and thus having symbolically gained a partial victory over time and the tyrannous reality principle, he prepares to encounter a composite image of paternal authority in the Knight of Night and Death who proves to be a "blooming boy." In all probability, the boy is to be interpreted as the infantile shadow, and therefore an image of Gareth's own unconscious infantile self. Two circumstances suggest this interpretation: first, in using Lancelot's armour Gareth symbolically takes on Lancelot's personality which is itself divided in its loyalty between conscience and destructive immersion in incest; and second, Lynette identifies herself as a maternal figure as she sits talking to Lancelot while Gareth sleeps.





Seem I not as tender to him  
 As any mother? Ay, but such a one  
 As all day long hath rated at her child,  
 And vext his day, but blesses him asleep --  
 Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle  
 In the hush'd night, as if the world were one  
 Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!  
 (1256-1262)

Whether Gareth's rebirth from the infantile womb-cave is successful or not is equivocal:

And he that told the tale in older times  
 Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,  
 But he that told it later says Lynette.  
 (1392-1394)

It is of great symbolic importance whether Gareth married Lynette, a distinctly maternal figure reminiscent of the prideful Princess or Maud; or Lyonors, the anima trapped in the uroboric womb symbolized by the serpentine coils of the river which surrounds her castle. The ambiguity suggested here has analogues in Tennyson's earlier poetry and is for obvious reasons central to the exegesis of the archetype and imagery of the Idylls as a whole.

"The Marriage of Geraint" extends and clarifies the ambiguous nature of the anima figure with which "Gareth and Lynette" ends. Significantly, Geraint's vindication of the incestuous mother, Guinevere, is the avowed antecedent of his meeting with Enid. Indeed, there are indications that Enid is herself a maternal figure, at least from Geraint's point of view. The plot of "The Marriage" almost





duplicates that of The Princess, in which Ida is a figure comparable in most respects to Enid. The distortions of the Oedipal pattern are similar to those which dominate The Princess. The tyrannical father, Edyrn, like the Prince's father, is excluded from the world dominated by the heroine and is replaced by the totally ineffectual Earl Yniol, comparable to the aged Gama. What vitiates Geraint's dream of perfect marriage to Enid seems to be the threat of castration by the tyrannous father, enacted several times in "The Marriage of Geraint" and its sequel, "Geraint and Enid." What differentiates the Geraint poems from The Princess is Geraint's avowed projection of his fear of incest onto Enid. The ambiguity of Enid's character for Geraint seems to be symbolized by the tower of her ruined castle:

Here stood a shatter'd archway plumed with fern;  
 And here had fallen a great part of a tower,  
 Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,  
 And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers;  
 And high above a piece of turret stair,  
 Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound  
 Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems  
 Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,  
 And suck'd the joining of the stones, and look'd  
 A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove.

(316-325)

From Geraint's neurotic point of view, the father's prohibition includes not only incest, but ultimately all sexuality. Geraint's defeat of Edyrn is not sufficient to free Enid from the ambiguous projection suggested in the description of the tower, but only through



a symbolic murder of the tyrannical father can the beneficent father be released to act upon the hero. In terms of The Princess, the unmotivated conversion of Edyrn, like that of the Prince's father and Arac, is to be viewed as a distortion of the true nature of the situation, a distortion which cannot hide Geraint's continuing fear of castration. Geraint differs from the Prince in that he is unwilling to take refuge in regression, but continues the pursuit of the tyrannical father.

In the sequel, "Geraint and Enid," the father appears in the form of Limours and Earl Doorm, who like Edyrn are former lovers of Enid. Geraint overcomes the tyrannical father's rivalry for his beloved by wounding Limours and by decapitating Doorm, the latter symbolizing the castration of the father and thus the removal of his power over the hero. As a result, Eden is restored:

And never yet, since high in Paradise  
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,  
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind  
Than lived thro' her who in that perilous hour  
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,  
And felt him hers again.

(762-767)

The fear of sexuality, inspired by a prohibition of incest which alienates the hero from all instinct, is overcome by the defeat and conversion of the tyrannous father and the differentiation of Enid from the maternal Guinevere. Geraint's victory over the





infantilism which caused his neurosis is part of the larger attempt to overcome neurosis which is dramatized in the main plot of the Idylls. After the dark comedy of "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid," infantilism gradually overwhelms the forces of Arthur which attempt to control it. Such is the conflict of "Balin and Balan."

The tenuous control of the spirit over the instincts and the forces which the spirit must counteract is crystallized in the conflict of the principals in "Merlin and Vivien." When he falls, Merlin, as the symbol of the spirit, carries the entire order with him. Merlin's flight to Brittany is his reaction to the incipient failure of the Arthurian order of which he is the spiritual founder. The failure of the order appears to be Merlin's own failure, for he dimly recognizes the duality in his nature which causes men to wonder if he is a "master of art" or the devil's son. Those values, intellect, the moral poetic vision, and conscience, for which Merlin appears to stand are ambiguous because they are both values in their own right and products of repression, and as such are subservient to the impulses which motivate them. As a magician and spirit-father Merlin is the masculine equivalent of the Great Mother, whom his magical or "psychic" power enables him to control.<sup>6</sup> However, in his desire to separate himself from instinct, he falls prey to the



danger of overdifferentiation, complete alienation from instinct, thus constellating the forces of instinct against him. Vivien is able to beguile Merlin's melancholy because she recognizes that in spite of his better self he is inexorably drawn to her as the fulfillment of his unconscious wish to be possessed. Merlin's situation is expressed emblematically in his reference to the constellation Orion:

A single misty star,  
Which is the second in a line of stars  
That seem a sword beneath a belt of three,  
I never gazed upon it but I dreamt  
Of some vast charm concluded in that star  
To make fame nothing.

(506-511)

Merlin is attracted by the "vast charm" of Orion's phallus-sword, which is a symbol of his spiritual masculinity as well as his regressive sexual desires, for Orion was beloved of Eos, goddess of the dawn. He is thus both spirit-father and infantile shadow. The serpent-like Vivien appears to be the opposite which Merlin's, and through him Arthur's, excessive purity implies. Behind the mask of the wisdom of age and fidelity to the spirit lurks the child's desire to be possessed by his mother. Vivien personifies the deluge which sweeps away Merlin's hold on the world. Imprisoned in the hollow oak where "he lay as dead, / And lost to life and use and name and fame," he evidently returns to the womb.<sup>7</sup>





In the Idylls which follow "Merlin and Vivien" the need for the rebirth of the infantile personality, presented negatively in the fate of Merlin, becomes ever more pressing. In "Lancelot and Elaine" the fate of the nine diamonds, one won by Lancelot for each of nine years, suggests that the poem concerns rebirth. The nature of Lancelot's failure is indicated in the larger significance of Elaine and Guinevere, for they are modelled on Shakespeare's Ophelia and Gertrude. Tennyson invokes the bed-chamber scene of Hamlet in Lancelot's interview with Guinevere and Arthur. Lancelot is in the position of the early Hamlet attempting to transfer his affection from Gertrude, Tennyson's Guinevere, to the beneficent Ophelia, Tennyson's Elaine. When Lancelot chooses to stay with Guinevere he symbolically rejects the positive aspects of the archetypal masculine and feminine, Arthur and Elaine, and chooses self-destructive immersion in incest.

That Lancelot makes a valiant attempt to end his liaison with Guinevere is suggested by the many images of rebirth throughout the poem. The rivalry of Elaine and Guinevere is focused on the fate of the last diamond. The first stage of Lancelot's rebirth is regression, symbolized, as it frequently is in Tennyson, by the journey to the east: leaving the "barren-beaten thoroughfare,"





Lancelot loses his way in fancy (a descent into the unconscious) until he reaches the Castle of Astolat "fired from the west." The configuration of characters and episodes concerning Lancelot's stay at Astalot is reminiscent of that of The Princess where Florian and Cyril parallel Sir Lavaine and Sir Torre, the adolescent idealist and the cynic respectively. In taking Sir Torre's blank shield Lancelot assumes the owner's personality, and symbolically recommences his own initiation with the idealistic Lavaine as his guide. That the rebirth is abortive is suggested by Lancelot's being wounded at the tournament, and by the subsequent events in the hermit's cave-womb where Elaine delivers the diamond and nurses him in his sickness. His holy resolves during his sickness, symbol of his guilt, are attempts to repress his desires for Guinevere, but each time the sickness abates the "bright image of one face," Guinevere, disperses his hard-found tranquillity, for his attachment to Guinevere is as tenacious as ever. Lancelot gives the diamonds, symbol of his masculinity, to Guinevere who immediately casts them into the river just as Elaine had dreamed earlier that she herself would do. In this act Elaine and Guinevere are identified, an identification which points to the complex nature of Lancelot's neurosis: that the positive and negative aspects of the archetypal feminine are fused



is central to Lancelot's failure in this and in the later Grail quest. The casting of the diamonds into the river symbolizes the disappearance of the self into the unconscious, as indeed a son's romantic attachment to his mother necessitates. In the circumstances of Elaine's death Tennyson invokes the unfortunate Ophelia as she floats down the river, and implies the irrevocability of Lancelot's choice, to his own and Arthur's destruction. Lancelot says,

Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
 Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
 These bonds that so defame me. Not without  
 She wills it -- would I, if she will'd it? nay,  
 Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,  
 I pray him, send a sudden angel down  
 To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
 And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.  
 (1408-1416)

Lancelot's fate is that of the diamonds, absorption by the unconscious. His attempt to avoid the inexorable logic of his choice is one of the chief concerns of "The Holy Grail."

Of all Tennyson's poems, "The Holy Grail" is the most skillfully constructed to illustrate religious vision as a means to the sublimation of uncontrollable sexual impulses. Percivale's sister, whose vision cannot be doubted, is described as glowing

With such a fervent flame of human love,  
 Which, being rudely blunted, glanced and shot  
 Only to holy things,  
 (74-76)





which clearly illustrates the effect of the canalization of sexual energy. Overcome by a sense of guilt which causes intermittent neurotic hysteria, Lancelot seeks once and for all to sublimate the red rose of love in his search for the Holy Grail which is significantly described as "blood-red" and "rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive," an image closely related to the several bloody roses in Maud. The psychological principle behind the imagery of both is that the canalization of sexual energy is accomplished through an analogue of the object of instinct.

In understanding the quest for the Grail, Lancelot is denying the prescribed form of sublimation, the Arthurian ideal of sublimation through social action. Arthur could hardly be expected to condone the decomposition of the physical world and the exaltation of a subjective vision whose principle is the negation of natural phenomena. Indeed, at the moment that the knights vow to find the Grail, Arthur is out putting his ideal into action by avenging an outraged maiden.

The difficulty of the quest stems from the varying degree of reality which the Grail has for each of the potential visionaries; only for Galahad is vision more real than the phenomenal world. Lancelot himself is poised between two contrasting pairs of visionaries, Galahad and Percivale, for whom the vision is a tangible



reality; and Sir Bors and Gawain, whose insensitivity to vision finally leads them to realize that the quest is not for them.

The pattern of ascent which is narrated in Percivale's vision resembles earlier modes of ascent in the Idylls, with this difference, that in the quest for vision the material world can play no part, and hence falls into dust. Descending to a lonely vale, Percivale encounters a hermit who explains that his thirst can be quenched only at the moment of true humility, which because it is a true negation of the ego is a prerequisite to the ascent to spiritual rebirth. Only the strange power of Galahad's eyes is sufficient to dispel the reality of the phenomenal world imaged in the burning of a tree "rotten with a hundred years of death," and in a "great black swamp" with an "evil smell." From a bridge built by "some ancient king," presumably Christ, Percivale watches the Armageddon of the physical world and the final exaltation of Galahad. Through the spiritual womb of the Grail, Galahad is reborn into vision. Significantly, of all Arthur's knights Galahad is the only one free of sexual desire.

The circumstances of Percivale's faltering from the quest, his attraction to his now-widowed youthful beloved, the only woman he can ever love, form a pattern now familiar as a disguised Oedipus archetype. Percivale's repression of his infantile desires is





hard won:

I came upon her once again,  
 And one had wedded her, and he was dead,  
 And all his land and wealth and state were hers.  
 And while I tarried, every day she set  
 A banquet richer than the day before  
 By me, for all her longing and her will  
 Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn,  
 I walking to and fro beside a stream  
 That flash'd across her orchard underneath  
 Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,  
 And calling me the greatest of all knights,  
 Embraced me, and so kiss'd me the first time,  
 And gave herself and all her wealth to me  
 Then I remember'd Arthur's warning word,  
 That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
 And the quest faded in my heart.

. . . . .

but one night my vow  
 Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,  
 But wail'd and wept, and hated mine own self,  
 And even the holy quest, and all but her;  
 Then after I was join'd with Galahad  
 Cared not for her nor anything upon earth.

(584-611)

Percivale's guilt results in an effective canalization of sexual energy into the spiritual quest, as Lancelot's does not.

For Lancelot effective sublimation is an impossibility, since his virtue and his sin are totally interdependent. He explains to Arthur,





O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,  
 Happier are those that welter in their sin,  
 Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,  
 Slime of the ditch; but in me lived a sin  
 So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,  
 Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung  
 Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower  
 And poisonous grew together, each as each,  
 Not to be pluck'd asunder; and when thy knights  
 Sware, I swear with them only in the hope  
 That could I touch or see the Holy Grail  
 They might me pluck'd asunder.

. . . . .

I yearn'd and strove  
 To tear the twain asunder in my heart,  
 My madness came upon me as of old,  
 And whipt me into waste fields far away.

(766-785)

In terms of Tennyson's earlier poetry, sense and conscience are inextricably bound together, not to be sundered by repression. Such is the final impasse of the sensual aspect of the Tennysonian hero, an impasse perhaps most clearly seen in the explanation of the fate of the old man in "The Vision of Sin."

Then some one spake: 'Behold! it was a crime  
 Of sense avenged by sense that wore with time.'  
 Another said: 'The crime of sense became  
 The crime of malice, and is equal blame.'  
 And one: 'He had not wholly quench'd his power;  
 A little grain of conscience made him sour.'

(213-218)

Lancelot's inability to achieve the vision he desires is related to his rejection of Elaine, for as the anima she holds out the hope of the marriage of sense and conscience. Entering the enchanted



towers of Carbonek, he says he heard a voice from an eastern tower, presumably the voice of Elaine:

But always in the quiet house I heard,  
 Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,  
 A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower  
 To the eastward. Up I climb'd a thousand steps  
 With pain; as in a dream I seem'd to climb  
 For ever; at the last I reach'd a door,  
 A light was in the crannies, and I heard,  
 'Glory and joy and honor to our Lord  
 And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail!'  
 Then in my madness I essay'd the door;  
 It gave, and thro' a stormy glare, a heat  
 As from a seven-times-heated furnace, I,  
 Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,  
 With such a fierceness that I swoon'd away --  
 O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,  
 All pall'd in crimson samite, and around  
 Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes!  
 And but for all my madness and my sin,  
 And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw  
 That which I saw; but what I saw was veil'd  
 And cover'd, and this quest was not for me.  
 (829-849)

The analogy of climbing stairs with sexual intercourse points to the sexual nature of the quest.<sup>8</sup> Tennyson's apparent identification of Elaine with the Grail is fitting since, as the anima, she is the womb through whom Lancelot is trying to be reborn. The frenetic pace of Lancelot's search for the Grail precludes the total passivity and receptivity requisite to vision, for it is sought not for itself alone but as a cure for incipient madness.

The attempt to sublimate infantile sexual desires on the model prescribed by Arthur is abandoned in the last quests of the





Idylls of the King, "Pelleas and Ettarre" and "The Last Tournament." Significantly, the central situation of the last adventures is a bedroom scene, the varying attitudes toward which focus on some of the pervasive ambiguities dramatized in earlier Idylls.

In "Pelleas and Ettarre" the tyrannical father appears as a necessary but unrecognized counterpoise to the increasingly obvious infantilism of the hero. There is a basic problem in treating the poem from a Freudian point of view since the ostensible theme contrasts with my own approach. Pelleas appears to typify the beauty of youthful innocence which, in encountering the horrors of the immoral world of experience, turns to a cynicism verging on madness. From a Freudian point of view, however, the tale must be viewed as an elaborate distortion of a son's unconscious desire for his mother and resentment of his father. Several circumstances suggest this interpretation. Pelleas is a rural prince whose early feminine companionship has been confined to his own family, his mother and sisters, and whose father has recently died. Furthermore, he seeks a woman who corresponds to an internal image, apparently that of his mother as well as Guinevere:

And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
 In special, half-awake he whisper'd: 'Where?  
 O, where? I love thee, tho' I know thee not.  
 For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,  
 For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.'

(39-45)



Lying "at random" on the brown earth like Milton's Samson, Pelleas dreams the Keatsian poet's dream of perfect love, awakens, and in his complete unconsciousness of his own situation believes it truth. In awakening from the dream he refuses to recognize Ettarre and Guinevere as Dalilas, for he apparently wishes to remain unconscious of his true desires. Fundamentally, the situation with which "Pelleas and Ettarre" begins is that of Maud, and has similar significance. Pelleas' dream, like that of the speaker of Maud, must end as a nightmare, for the garden of lilies and roses where he finds his beloved and Gawain, like the garden-pit of Maud, is really his parents' bed-chamber. Gawain and Ettarre are negative figures because Pelleas must reject the desires which he projects on them. Thus the basis of Pelleas' cynicism is quite other than he suggests. Instead of seeing in Pelleas the elaborate distortion of the disillusioned idealist, one can instead view him as a psychological infant whose idealism masks exactly those desires which eventually destroy the Round Table. That Pelleas recognizes something of his deeper motivation is suggested by his symbolic castration in leaving his sword across the necks of Gawain and Ettarre, and by his subsequent inability to fight Lancelot. Pelleas' attitude toward Gawain resembles that of Hamlet toward Claudius, conscious hatred and un-





conscious sympathy for revolt and incest. The tragedy of Arthur can be seen obliquely in that of Pelleas, for they are both unconscious of their own situation.

"The Last Tournament" is a less distorted treatment of the same archetypal situation as that of "Pelleas and Ettarre." The myth of Tristram and Isolt has a peculiar importance for Tennyson since it is the myth not only of "The Last Tournament" but of the Idylls as a whole and of Maud. Tennyson makes little attempt to disguise the nature of his hero's desires, for the death of Nestling is a symbol of the death of renewed spiritual potential, and in my own terms is an implied abandonment to incest. The death of sexual innocence is symbolized by Tristram's winning of the ruby carcanet which is subsequently associated with blood, an association similar to that of the red rose of love in Maud. In Isolt, Tristram sees an image of himself just as Narcissus saw his own image reflected in the pool:

But thro' the slowly-mellowing avenues  
And solitary passes of the wood  
Rode Tristram toward Lyonesse and the west.  
Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt  
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore  
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood  
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye  
For all that walk'd, or crept, or perch'd, or flew.  
Anon the face, as when a gust hath blown,  
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape





Of one that in them sees himself, return'd;  
 But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,  
 Or even at a fallen feather, vanish'd again.  
 (360-372)

Tristram's egotism is that of a child who sees his whole being in his mother and refuses to recognize any authority beyond his desire. The truly devoted Isolt of the White Hands, like the unfortunate Echo, has no power to alter this psychologically disastrous situation. The result of the rivalry of the positive and negative feminine figures, Isolt of Brittany and Isolt of Ireland, like that of Elaine and Guinevere, is conclusive: Tristram dreams that

He seem'd to pace the strand of Brittany  
 Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,  
 And show'd them both the ruby-chain, and both  
 Began to struggle for it, till his queen  
 Graspt it so hard that all her hand was red.  
 Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!  
 These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,  
 And melts within her hand -- her hand is hot  
 With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,  
 Is all as cool and white as any flower.'  
 (406-415)

His entrance into that ambiguous paradise of infantile desire, the parental bed-chamber, must inevitably be suicidal. After consummating his love with Isolt

He spoke, he turn'd, then, flinging round her neck,  
 Claspt it, and cried, 'Thine Order, O my queen!'  
 But, while he bow'd to kiss the jewell'd throat,  
 Out of the dark, just as the lips had touch'd,  
 Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek --  
 'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him thro' the brain.  
 (743-748)



The significance of this scene seems to be the same as that of the bedroom scene in "Pelleas and Ettarre."

Arthur's relationship to the adventures of Pelleas and Tristram is dramatized in all its ambiguity in "Guinevere," where Arthur appears not as the beneficent King Hamlet, but as a Prince Hamlet who, fearing incest, alienates himself from all instinct. Hamlet orders his beloved Ophelia to get herself to a nunnery just as Guinevere has done. Arthur's case against Guinevere is a repulsion toward her sexuality:

I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,  
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh,  
Looking down on thine polluted, cries,  
'I loathe thee;' yet not less, O Guinevere,  
For I was ever virgin save for thee,  
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life  
So far that my doom is, I love thee still.

(550-556)

Like Hamlet, Arthur appears revolted by the sins of the flesh. Having thought Guinevere only the innocent Ophelia, Arthur discovers that she is the lethal maternal anima, Gertrude, as well. Because Guinevere is both, Arthur can retain his integrity only by rejecting her. This calculated alienation from instinct verges on the complete ignorance of total repression, an ignorance which on the one hand is the only means of coming to terms with the forces represented by Guinevere, and on the other, necessarily





only a partial answer. Arthur's tragedy is that implicit in Tennyson's earlier poetry: sense and conscience cannot co-exist, nor can they long continue to exist separately. As a symbol of the wayward flesh, Guinevere asks the question which haunts all of Tennyson's poetry:

Ah my God,  
What might I not have made of thy fair world,  
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?  
(649-651)

In her agony Guinevere manifests Arthur's faith in will power, for only with will power born of guilt can she hope to remold herself into the image approved by Arthur. Perhaps Rollo May's account of Victorian will power, albeit unsympathetic, is with some modification relevant here:

"Will power" expresses the arrogant efforts of Victorian man to manipulate nature and to rule nature with an iron hand (vide industrialism and capitalism); and to manipulate himself, rule his own life in the same way as an object (shown particularly in Protestantism but present in other modern ethical and religious systems as well). Thus "will" was set over against "wish" and used as a faculty by which "wish" could be denied. I have observed in patients that the emphasis on "will power" is often a reaction formation to their own repressed passive desires, a way of fighting off their wishes to be taken care of; and the likelihood is that this mechanism had much to do with the form will power took in Victorianism. Victorian man sought, as Schachtel has put it, to deny that he ever had been a child, to repress his irrational tendencies and so-called infantile wishes as unacceptable to his concept of himself as a grown-up and responsible man. Will power was then a way of avoiding awareness of bodily and of sexual urges or hostile impulses that did not fit the picture of the controlled, well-managed self.<sup>9</sup>



As far as the "blameless" Arthur is concerned, his innocence is a measure of his alienation from instinct, an alienation which casts a pall of futility and self-deception over his efforts to transform man into his own image. Perhaps we can see an emblem of Arthur's lack of authority in the bedroom scene of "Lancelot and Elaine," where after Lancelot lies to Arthur in order to remain with Guinevere, Arthur "glanced first at him, then her, and went his way." Arthur's tragedy lies in the fact that there seems to be no alternative to this precarious innocence, for in order to go on, man must "dream a dream of good," as the speaker of In Memoriam calls his faith in his Arthur:

Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,  
 So far, so near in woe and weal,  
 O loved the most, when most I feel  
 There is a lower and a higher;

Known and unknown, human, divine;  
 Sweet human hand and lips and eye;  
 Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,  
 Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;

Strange friend, past, present, and to be;  
 Loved deeplier, darklier understood;  
 Behold, I dream a dream of good,  
 And mingle all the world with thee.

(CXXIX)

In "The Passing of Arthur" the death of the dream of "life in civic action warm" leaves Arthur's world a winter wasteland.





The cycle of the hero myth is complete in "The Passing" where Arthur returns to the west where he was born. From the wasteland like a vast death-bed, Arthur journeys to Avilion, accompanied by the three weeping queens, apparently the three types of Guinevere, through whom he is to be reborn.<sup>10</sup> It is Arthur's fate that he should suffer dissociation from all sources of life, not only from the ambiguous unconscious but from the physical world as well. Lying mortally wounded, Arthur tells Bedivere:

on my heart hath fallen  
Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be king;  
Behold, I seem but king among the dead.  
(143-146)

Returning his sword to the Lady of the Lake, Arthur symbolically returns his masculine power to the mysterious source of life and death, the unconscious, but only after having killed and been mortally wounded by Modred, his nephew and symbolic son. Tennyson's allusion to Hamlet in Arthur's final speech is a touchstone to the significance of "The Passing." Arthur plays the mysterious Prince Hamlet to Bedivere's skeptical and perplexed Horatio:





The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
 And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
 Comfort thyself; what comfort is in me?  
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
 May He within himself make pure! but thou,  
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
 (408-421)

Tennyson is invoking Hamlet's colloquy with Horatio concerning  
 the ghost of the dead King Hamlet:

Hor. O day and night, but this wondrous strange!  
 Ham. And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.  
 There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
 Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.  
 (I, v, 164-167)

Arthur, like Prince Hamlet, is affirming his fidelity to the benefi-  
 cent father in the face of the doubt of the rationalist. All else re-  
 mains a question. Whether Arthur had returned to Avilion to be  
 healed and whether he will again return to this world remains un-  
 answered. With the rising of the new sun bringing the new year,  
 the world is reborn and the cycle begins again. What form the  
 British Christ will take in his next incarnation is left uncertain,  
 although in the catharsis of doubt which the reader experiences  
 through Bedivere there can be little question that he will return.



In terms of Tennyson's earlier poetry, the tragic vision of the Idylls of the King can be seen as a result of the conflict between the private and the public man, the man of sense and the man of conscience. I do not find the poem defaced even in parts by "delusions of certainty," as Carr does, nor do I find it a covert capitulation to the Victorian age.<sup>11</sup> The dramatic interaction of Lancelot and Arthur precludes such a rash generalization. Arthur in his blamelessness combines, like all tragic heroes, the greatest potentiality with the gravest limitations. To such a combination there can be no simple response. Perhaps it would be apposite to apply Eliot's remark on Tennyson as "the most instinctive rebel against the society in which he was the most perfect conformist" to the twin heroes of the Idylls. Such a conflict seems to me to be the basis of Tennyson's tragic vision and a natural culmination of the whole of his earlier development.





## CHAPTER VII

### TENNYSON'S FINAL VISION

The striking continuity of the development of the archetype and imagery in Tennyson's poetry is perhaps most obvious in some of Tennyson's other late poems, in the finest of which he presents the dramatic interaction of sense and conscience so as not to compromise the separate, imaginative validity of the opposing values. "The Voyage of Maeldune," "Lucretius," "The Ancient Sage," and "Tiresias" dramatize the several aspects of the conflict of sense and conscience in terms of the problem of the poet. The conflict of the aesthetic of sense and the moral aesthetic is presented in terms of Tennyson's characteristic symbols, but with the values at stake thrown into sharper relief than is usual in his other late poems. An analysis of the imagery and archetype of the final poems should clarify some aspects of my own understanding of Tennyson. It seems to me that the complex melancholia which moves Tennyson's poetic cosmos approaches but does not actually achieve the purgation which it has been approaching.

The archetype and imagery of "The Voyage of Maeldune" is a remarkable extension of the imaginative world of Tennyson's



earlier poems, particularly Maud and the Idylls. Maeldune's responsibility, like that of Prince Hamlet, is to revenge his murdered father:

I was the chief of the race -- he had stricken my father dead --  
But I gather'd my fellows together, I swore I would strike off  
his head.

. . . . .  
He lived on an isle in the ocean -- we sail'd on a Friday morn --  
He that had slain my father the day before I was born.

(1-8)

What lies between Maeldune and the discharge of his duty is the ever-present temptation to regress to the ambiguous infantile garden world of sensual indulgence. Blown from the isle of his enemy "out and away thro' the boundless sea," Maeldune begins his voyage of self-discovery, for as in Hamlet the temptations of the maternal bed-chamber symbolized by the array of gardens in "The Voyage" lie between the hero and the fulfillment of revenge. The first eight gardens appear in deliberately contrasted pairs in which one element is attractive but enervating because there is no promise of fulfillment, and the other threatens murderous satiation. Each of the pairs is a variation on the ambiguous garden in Maud which is both Gertrude's bedroom and Ophelia's grave. The Silent Isle is similar to the island of the Lotus-eaters where ease threatens dissociation:





It was all of it fair as life, it was all of it quiet as death,  
 And we hated the beautiful isle, for whenever we strove to speak  
 Our voices were thinner and fainter than any flittermouse-shriek;  
 And the men that were mighty of tongue and could raise such a  
     battle-cry

That a hundred who heard it would rush on a thousand lances and die --  
 O, they to be so dumb'd by the charm! -- so fluster'd with anger  
     were they

They almost fell on each other; but after we sail'd away.

(20-26)

The complement of the Silent Isle is the Isle of Shouting where the sound of wild birds with "human voices and words" bringing murder and death recalls the "thousand horrible bellowing echoes" of the pit in Maud and the slaying which accompanies that sound. Essentially the same juxtaposition of the contrasting aspects of the garden world is duplicated in the contrast of the Isles of Flowers and Fruits. Like the Silent Isle, the former promises only frustration,

Blossom and blossom, and promise of blossom, but never a fruit!  
 And we hated the Flowering Isle, as we hated the isle that was  
     mute,

(51-52)

like the garden of love and parricide in Maud:

But I know where a garden grows,  
 Fairer than aught in the world beside,  
 All made up of the lily and rose  
 That blow by night, when the season is good,  
 To the sound of dancing music and flutes:  
 It is only flowers, they had no fruits,  
 And I almost fear they are not roses, but blood.

(310-316)

In contrast, satiation and guilt await Maeldune and his men in the





## Isle of Fruits:

But in every berry and fruit was the poisonous pleasure of wine;  
 And the peak of the mountain was apples, and the hugest that  
     ever were seen,  
 And they prest, as they grew, on each other, with hardly a  
     leaflet between,  
 And all of them redder than rosiest health or than uttermost  
     shame,  
 And setting, when Even descended, the very sunset aflame.  
 And we stay'd three days, and we gorged and we madden'd,  
     till every one drew  
 His sword on his fellow to slay him, and ever they struck  
     and they slew.

(62-68)

As in Tennyson's earlier poetry, the crime of sense inexorably leads to the crime of malice and finally to suicidal guilt. Giddy and crazed with fruit some of Maeldune's men destroy themselves in the libidinal flames of the Isle of Fire, or return to the rest of the womb in the undersea isle. Again the dual aspect of regression is presented in the Bounteous Isle and the Isle of Witches, one, the beautiful but stultifying paradise of relaxation on the bosom of the beneficent mother where manna drops from the calm dawn sky; and the other, an island of naked sirens who sing in the red dawn to tempt the mariners to their destruction. On the Isle of the Double Towers the basic division in the garden world is symbolized by the battle of the tower of "clean-cut stone," apparently a masculine symbol, with the tower of "carven flowers," apparently feminine. Like the horrible bellowing echoes of the pit in Maud, the "clash and boom of bells" rings murder



into the hearts of the mariners until they take sides with the towers in just such a suicidal conflict as characterizes the speaker's murder of the Sultan in the earlier poem. Significantly, although the forces of the tower of the carven flowers are superior, there is no victory. Given the symbolic significance of the gardens, the resolution of the poem could hardly be other than it is: Maeldune abandons his desire for revenge. In dimly recognizing, like Hamlet, that his conscious desire for revenge is complemented by unconscious sympathy with his father's murderer, Maeldune seeks some alleviation of his guilt in an affirmation of conscience. The resolution of "The Voyage of Maeldune" is very like that of Maud.

That belief in the power of conscience beyond man's own ego is a necessary counterpoise to the potentially destructive allurements of the madness of sense is dramatized in "Lucretius," where the fate of the materialist poet becomes a parable of the unreason of human materialism for all artists and all men. Tennyson symbolizes the ambiguous significance of the world of nature in the dual nature of Venus as the genetrix of De Rerum Natura, and the great castrating bitch of the Adonis legend. Behind Lucretius' Epicurean calm lies the spectre of sensuality and self-destruction:





O ye Gods,  
 I know you careless, yet, behold, to you  
 From childly wont and ancient use I call --  
 I thought I lived securely as yourselves --  
 No lewdness, narrowing envy, monkey-spite,  
 No madness of ambition, avarice, none;  
 No larger feast than under plane or pine  
 With neighbors laid along the grass, to take  
 Only such cups as left us friendly-warm,  
 Affirming each his own philosophy --  
 Nothing to marr the sober majesties  
 Of settled, sweet, Epicurean life.  
 But now it seems some unseen monster lays  
 His vast and filthy hands upon my will,  
 Wrenching it backward into his, and spoils  
 My bliss in being.

(207-222)

Ignoring the magnetic power of instinct symbolized by the potion of the lethal anima, Lucilia, Lucretius allows instinct to overwhelm his defenseless ego, for evidently behind his materialism lurks the wish to die. Asking himself the meaning of the "prodigies of myriad nakednesses" and "twisted shapes of lust, unspeakable," Lucretius answers himself with a rhetorical question: "'How should the mind, except it loved them, clasp/These idols to herself?'" (164-165) Apparently his deepest desire is to be possessed, "half-suffocated," by the Hetairai, the "hired animalisms" sprung from the blood shed by Sylla; or destroyed by the fire from the phallic breasts of Helen before which his own phallus-sword is helpless. His dream of sensuality culminates in his waking vision of the Satyr pursuing an Oread, in whose sensual beauty Lucretius delights



and with whom he sympathizes, only to have her fling herself on him. Then, surprised at himself he does not know whether the rape attracts or repels him:

Catch her, goat-foot! nay,  
Hide, hide them, million-myrtled wilderness,  
And cavern-shadowing laurels, hide! do I wish --  
What? -- that the bush were leafless? or to whelm  
All of them in one massacre?  
(202-207)

Behind his demonic possession seems to be guilt for the denial of conscience which manifests itself as a desire to die:

But he who holds  
The Gods are careless, wherefore need he care  
Greatly for them, nor plunge at once,  
Being troubled, wholly out of sight, and sink  
Past earthquake -- ay, and gout and stone, that break  
Body toward death, and palsy, death-in-life,  
And wretched age -- and worst disease of all,  
These prodigies of myriad nakednesses,  
And twisted shapes of lust, unspeakable,  
Abominable, strangers at my hearth  
Not welcome, harpies miring every dish,  
The phantom husks of something foully done,  
And fleeting thro' the boundless universe,  
And blasting the long quiet of my breast  
With animal heat and dire insanity?  
(149-163)

Implicit in Epicurean reason is that demonic irrationality which leads not only to individual but to social disintegration, for in Lucretian theory lies the pervasive destructiveness of egotism and its concomitant regression. Lucretius awakens to a bloody passion in himself which is not unlike that which makes a steaming slaughter-





house of the decadent Roman republic. There is a terrible irony in Lucretius' comparison of his own death, which is meaningless, to that of Lucretia whose death freed Rome from the tyranny of the Tarquins. In Lucretius' final question, "What is duty?" lies the answer to his dilemma. Denial of relevance of the gods, of conscience, and duty, is paradoxically the enslavement of the individual and the society to bestiality. The social mission of the poet is necessary for his own and for the sanity of his civilization.

Tennyson's last major dialogue of sense and conscience is "The Ancient Sage," in which in contrast to "Lucretius," Tennyson addresses himself to the avowed sensualist, not only his contemporaries in the eighteen-eighties, but to his own youthful aesthetic self. The aesthetic self appears in its characteristic garb, that of the youthful poet of "The Vision of Sin." For the sensitive and sensual aesthete the beautiful anima is dead, and with her the desire to live:

The years that when my youth began  
 Had set the lily and rose  
 By all my ways where'er they ran,  
 Have ended mortal foes;  
 My rose of love for ever gone,  
 My lily of truth and trust --  
 They made her lily and rose in one,  
 And changed her into dust.  
 O rose-tree planted in my grief,  
 And growing on her tomb,





Her dust is greening in your leaf,  
 Her blood is in your bloom.  
 O slender lily waving there,  
 And laughing back the light,  
 In vain you tell me "Earth is fair"  
 When all is dark as night.  
 (155-170)

Against the knowledge of sense and concomitant resignation to the world of time and death, the sage offers the oceanic feeling of timeless oneness with the whole of the universe, a feeling which appears to be a momentary incorporation of infantile wholeness on a higher level of consciousness:<sup>1</sup>

for more than once when I  
 Sat all alone, revolving in myself  
 The word that is the symbol of myself,  
 The mortal limit of the Self with loosed,  
 And past into the Nameless, as a cloud  
 Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs  
 Were strange, not mine -- and yet no shade of doubt,  
 But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self  
 The gain of such large life as match'd with ours  
 Were sun to spark -- unshadowable in words,  
 Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.  
 (229-239)

According to the Ancient Sage the fountain of inspiration flowing from the "dark cave" only seems to have its source below; its force is from the heights. In the transformation of the image of the fountain one can see an emblem of Tennyson's development from the poet of "Tears, Idle Tears" living the life-in-death of memory, to the poet of conscience who incorporates the spiritual



illumination of the unconscious into a vision of renewed wholeness. The sage tells the dissolute youth that the vision is to be had not only in the solitary world of the individual mind: through immersion in duty towards one's fellow-man, one can also climb the Mount of Vision. That the vision is to be had in acting fully upon one's social responsibilities is an important extension of the earlier private significance of the intimation in Lyric XCV of In Memoriam and in "The Holy Grail."

The dilemma of the earlier Tennyson, the life-in-death of memory and the death-in-life of the alienated ego, is only partially solved by the timeless fusion of the past and present in the moment of intimation. In "Tiresias" the poet-prophet laments that the vision of the ineffable beauty and wisdom of the beneficent anima lives only "in the hidden world of sight that lives behind [the] darkness," and cannot be shared:

There in a secret olive-glade I saw  
Pallas Athene climbing from the bath  
In anger; yet one glittering foot disturb'd  
The lucid well; one snowy knee was prest  
Against the margin flowers; a dreadful light  
Came from her golden hair, her golden helm  
And all her golden armor on the grass,  
And from her virgin breast, and virgin eyes  
Remaining fixt on mine, till mine grew dark  
For ever, and I heard a voice that said,  
"Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much,  
And speak the truth that no man may believe."

(38-49)





The curse of blindness seems to be a symbol of the introverted vision of wholeness, which is useless in the warlike conditions of existence. Thebes could be built only by the slaying of the dragon whose death inspires the almost implacable revenge of his father, Mars. Civilization can be maintained only by constant war against the dark, aggressive powers which threaten its destruction, a war in which the poet of private vision can fight only vicariously. The self-sacrifice necessary to "quench the red God's anger" requires more than the prophet-poet has to offer. Having successfully bridged the worlds of sense and the individual conscience, the Tennysonian poet is left with the burden of his inability to realize the dictates of conscience in his civilization through the poetry of action, the tongue of the noble example. Even in so pessimistic a portrait of the poet's power as "Tiresias" is that affirmation of the prophetic function of the poet which moves the Idylls of the King and Tennyson's last poems. In having seen the darkness in man, the prophet sees self-sacrifice as a wall against the incipient chaos in the social order and in the heart of the individual man.

In the poetry of Tennyson the dialectic of sense and conscience is dramatized as the interaction of an aesthetic of sense and a moral aesthetic. We can see in the development of Tennyson's poetry an



attempt to re-establish the universal poet animated by what Hallam calls the "reciprocity of vigor between different orders of intelligence," which existed in the youthful period of English literature.<sup>2</sup>

In his final vision Tennyson tries to restore, if he does not actually succeed in restoring, the empire of the prophet which Hallam thought gone, never to return:

Those different powers of poetic disposition, the energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion, which in former times were intermingled, and derived from mutual support an extensive empire over the feelings of men, were now restrained within separate spheres of agency. The whole system no longer worked harmoniously, and by intrinsic harmony acquired external freedom; but there arose a violent and unusual action in the several component functions, each for itself, all striving to reproduce the regular power which the whole had once enjoyed.

Hence the melancholy which so evidently characterizes the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest. In the old times the poetic impulse went along with the general impulse of the nation; in these it is a reaction against it, a check acting for conservation against a propulsion towards change.

. . . . .

Our inference, therefore, from this change in the relative position of artists to the rest of the community is, that modern poetry in proportion to its depth and truth is likely to have little immediate authority over public opinion.<sup>3</sup>

Failure to credit fully the dialectic of sense and conscience in the whole of Tennyson's poetry has resulted in the modern misconception concerning the nature of Tennyson's imagination. Marshall McLuhan has suggested that "the Tennyson which the twentieth century has decided to bury is now regarded as the Polonius of





his age, the intoner of 'self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control.' . . . Divested of the mask of Polonius, Tennyson can be made to appear as a modern and morbid sensibility such as we have had presented by T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden."<sup>4</sup> That Tennyson should be seen as a confused and garrulous counsellor to his age is, I think, quite incorrect. Rather, Tennyson's poetic self might perhaps be seen as a melancholic Hamlet who has known the darkness of the garden of human desire, and understood in the ghost of King Hamlet, whom only he can see, that light of conscience which is salvation. The Polonian and morbid melancholic versions of Tennyson are distorted fragments of his complex poetic self which is to be seen in the imagery and archetype that incarnates the dialectic of sense and conscience.





## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

- <sup>1</sup> Eliot, "In Memoriam," Selected Essays, 294.
- <sup>2</sup> Carr, Tennyson as a Modern Poet," Critical Essays, 44.
- <sup>3</sup> Eliot, "In Memoriam," 290.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 290.
- <sup>5</sup> "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," 62.
- <sup>6</sup> Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism, 89.
- <sup>7</sup> Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn, 172.
- <sup>8</sup> Eliot, "In Memoriam," 125.
- <sup>9</sup> Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and and the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," Victorian Poetry and Poetics, 804.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 803.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 804.

### Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup> Jacobi, The Psychology of C. G. Jung, 111-116.
- <sup>2</sup> Tennyson, Unpublished Early Poems, 45.
- <sup>3</sup> Buckley, Tennyson, 191.

### Chapter III

- <sup>1</sup> Buckley, Tennyson, 49-50; Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, 9, 11.



<sup>2</sup>Strong, "A Reading of Tennyson's 'The Lotus-Eaters,'" Psychan. Rev. 1921, 8, 184-86.

<sup>3</sup>"Locksley Hall," 61.

<sup>4</sup>Jung and Kerenyi, Essays on a Science of Mythology, 87.

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness, 59-60.

#### Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>There are deficiencies in the interpretations in Buckley's Tennyson, 137-149, and Johnson's Alien Vision, 30-31. The latter suggests that Part III "seems hardly more than a sop to Victorian sentimentalism." Neither Buckley nor Johnson point out the obvious affinity of Maud with earlier poems, nor do they account for the curious identifications within the poem, or Tennyson's own love of the poem. Essentially, they fail to see the poem as an organic unity.

<sup>2</sup>Memoir, 396.

<sup>3</sup>Freud, Interpretation of Dreams, 310.

<sup>4</sup>Jones, Oedipus and Hamlet, 99-100.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Tennyson's lyric, "I know where a garden grows," seems to be echoed in William Morris' "I know a little garden close," which seems to portray something of the same psychological situation as the lyric in Maud.

#### Chapter VI

<sup>1</sup>Memoir, 396.

<sup>2</sup>Rank, Beyond Psychology, 62-102.





<sup>3</sup> Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> 72 ff., 161 ff., 356 ff., 585 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, 249, 274-82; Freud, New Introductory Lectures, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Jung and Kerenyi, Essays, 156-177.

<sup>7</sup> Kellog and Steele, in their edition of The Faerie Queene, point out in a footnote (p. 100) that the tree is a symbol of bondage in sin in the Fradubio episode of Book I.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, Introductory Lectures, 158.

<sup>9</sup> May, "Will, Decision and Responsibility, " REPP, 252, 253.

<sup>10</sup> Memoir, 123.

<sup>11</sup> Carr, "Tennyson as a Modern Poet, " 62.

## Chapter VII

<sup>1</sup> Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, 66-68.

<sup>2</sup> Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry," 806.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 806.

<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, "Introduction" to Selected Poetry, xiii.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Editions of Tennyson.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. The Complete Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson. 7 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904.

------. The Early Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson. Edited by John C. Collins. London: Methuen, 1900.

------. The Devil and the Lady, and Unpublished Early Poems. Edited by Charles Tennyson, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964.

------. The Poems and Plays of Alfred Lord Tennyson. New York: Modern Library, 1938.

------. The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems. London: Macmillan, 1892.

### Secondary Sources

#### 1. Books

Basler, Roy P. Sex, Symbolism, and Psychology. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1948.

Brooks, Cleanth. The Well-Wrought Urn. New York: Harcourt, [1956].

Buckley, Jerome H. Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.

------. The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture. New York: Random House, [1964].

Eliot, T. S. Selected Essays, 1917-1932. London: Faber and Faber, [1932].



- Freud, Sigmund. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Translated from German under the General Editorship of James Strachey and in collaboration with Anna Freud. 23 vols. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.
- Frye, H. Northrop. The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. New York: Atheneum, 1966.
- Houghton, Walter E. and G. R. Strange, eds. Victorian Poetry and Poetics. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.
- Jacobi, Jolande. The Psychology of C. G. Jung: An Introduction with Illustrations. Translated by Ralph Manheim from the German, 6th ed. revised. New Haven: Yale, [1962].
- Johnson, E. D. H. The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry. Princeton: Princeton University, 1952.
- Jones, Ernest. Hamlet and Oedipus: A Classic Study in the Psycho-analysis of Literature. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954.
- , Papers on Psycho-analysis. Boston: Beacon Press, [1961],
- Jung, C. G. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. 14 vols. Edited by Sir Herbert Read et al. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1957-1963],
- and C. Kerenyi. Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myths of the Divine Maiden and the Divine Child. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. New York: Harper and Row, [1963].
- Killham, John. Tennyson and The Princess: Reflections of an Age. London: The Athlone Press, 1958.
- , ed. Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.
- Marshall, George O., Jr. A Tennyson Handbook. New York: Twayne Publishers, [1963].





- Neumann, Erich. The Origins and History of Consciousness.  
Translated from the German by F. C. Hall with a Fore-  
word by C. G. Jung. New York: Harper, [1962].
- Nicolson, Harold. Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry. London: Arrow Books, [1960].
- Paden, W. D. Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery in his Earlier Work. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1942.
- Phillips, William, ed. Art and Psychoanalysis: Studies in the Application of Psychoanalytic Theory to the Creative Process.  
Introduction by William Phillips. Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963.
- Pitt, Valerie. Tennyson Laureate. London: Barrie and Rockliff, [1962].
- Rader, Ralph. Tennyson's Maud: The Biographical Genesis.  
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.
- Rank, Otto. Beyond Psychology. New York: Dover Publications, [1958].
- , The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings.  
Edited by Philip Freund. New York: Vintage Books, 1959.
- Smith, Elton, E. The Two Voices: A Tennyson Study. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, [1964].
- Spenser, Edmund. Books I and II of The Faerie Queene, The Mutabilitie Cantos, and Selections from the Minor Poetry.  
Edited by Robert Kellogg and Oliver Steele. New York: Odyssey, [1965],
- Tennyson, Hallam. Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son.  
New York: Macmillan, 1905.
- Wordsworth, William. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth.  
Edited by Thomas Hutchinson, A New Edition by Ernest De Selincourt. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.



## 2. Articles in Books and Periodicals

- Carr, Arthur J. "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in John Killham, ed., Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1963].
- Hallam, Arthur. "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," in Victorian Poetry and Poetics. Edited by Walter E. Houghton and G. R. Strange. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [1959].
- Johnson, E. D. H. "The Lily and the Rose: Symbolic Meaning in Tennyson's Maud," Publications of the Modern Language Association. LXIV (1949), 1222-1227.
- May, Rollo. "Will, Decision and Responsibility," Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, 1961, 248-259.
- McLuhan, M. H. "Introduction" to Alfred Lord Tennyson, Selected Poetry. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966.
- Ryals, C. "The 'Fatal Women' Symbol in Tennyson," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXXIV (1959), 352-361.
- . "The Moral Paradox of the Hero in Idylls of the King," English Literary History, XXX (1963), 83-95.
- Strong, Margaret. "A Reading of Tennyson's 'The Lotus-Eaters,'" Psychoanalytical Review 8 (1921), 184-186.







